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Alexei Panshin When The Quest Ended

As a youngster, I was a great fan of the stories of Robert Heinlein. I read them over and over again. My particular favorites were *Have Spacewill—Will Travel* and *Beyond This Horizon*. Eventually, I became the author of *Heinlein in Dimension*, not only the first critical study of his fiction, but the very first book on the work of any modern science fiction writer.

I loved what was noblest and best in Heinlein as well as anyone, and more than most. Consequently, watching the solipsistic self-devouring vampire that Heinlein became in his later years was particularly painful for me to watch.

It hurt me to hear of him as a Worldecon Guest of Honor delivering yet another warning against imminent atomic doom (as late as 1976!) and being booed from the balcony by people who had once admired him. It hurt to observe him from a distance as an old man whose interactions with readers and fans had become contingent upon their making blood bank donations, as though this were their only possible relevance for him. And it hurt to see Heinlein taking all of his earlier work and redefining it, not as various parts of a common Future History, as he had when he was a young writer, but rather as aspects of a state of being in which Robert Heinlein and his various clones and avatars—including the villainous Black Beast, Melrooney—were the only reality acknowledged to exist.

All of that hurt.

In the days of Heinlein's decline, struck by the immense disparity between the man that Heinlein might have become and should have become and the horror story he did become, I scrawled a line on a scrap of paper and threw it into the drawer where odd thoughts live. It said:

the agony of a solipsist living in a world he neither likes nor understands

That was as far as I could go toward empathizing with the wreck and forgiving Heinlein.

But it still didn't answer the question that nagged me most. How could a man so knowledgeable, so perceptive, so influential and so well-loved, even to the day he died, ever have ended so badly? I puzzled over that for years and years and years.

I should tell you frankly that Heinlein didn't love me as well as I loved him. What were the reasons? That was one more part of the puzzle.

Well, I offended the man—no doubt many more times than once. The crucial one was this:

More than twenty-five years ago, while I was researching *Heinlein in Dimension*, the widow of a friend of Heinlein's wrote to tell me of the existence of correspondence between Heinlein and her husband, and asked me if I wanted to have a look at Heinlein's letters. I accepted her offer, but didn't find anything there that seemed relevant to the critical examination of his fiction that I was writing. Presuming I had done nothing improper, I made no secret of the fact that I had seen those letters. But when Heinlein was told of it, his immediate reaction—before checking the facts, before reading what

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Alexei Panshin on Robert Heinlein's synthesis
Paul Park examines the "easy" style of hard sf

Brian Stahleford goes for baroque
with Alexander Jahllovov

Gwyneth Jones takes a crack at *Griffin's Egg*
Candas Jane Dorsey investigates the faults of reality
George Turner searches David Pringle's stars

*Plus turtles, griffins, dragon's teeth, depraved priests,
and other creatures of light and darkness
(including more bats).*

Paul Park The Shadow of Hard Science Fiction

I spoke to a self-identified lover of hard science fiction at a recent convention. She had just finished my novel, *The Cuck of Loving Kindness*, and still had some confusion about the basic cosmology of the Starbridge system. Answering her questions involved other questions; to answer them, I prepared this short statement which should clear everything up, completely and permanently.

When I originally started working on the Starbridge books, I conceived of them as taking place in our solar system, at some distant point in the evolution of our sun. Later I receded from that position a little bit because of practical constraints—setting a story several billion years in the future seemed unmanageable to me. So I tried to keep the planetary system more general in my own mind, though any discrepancies between it and our own—its location at the galaxy's edge, various evolutionary changes in common animals, the absence of moons on Neptune, etc.—could as a last resort be accounted for by the vast lapse of time.

So let us say that in a system of nine planets around a medium sized star in its main sequence, complex life evolves on the third planet out, a place blessed in many ways, and possessing a large moon. The outer planets are lonely, inhospitable places.

Now let us say that this system is very old, and its sun has reached the point where its store of hydrogen has been exhausted. Abruptly (in galactic terms) it begins to grow hotter and brighter and bigger. It starts to burn helium, starts to expand into its red giant stage. This is terrible, though not unexpected news for the inhabitants of the third planet: in time, the diameter of our sun, for example, will swell to the orbit of Mercury and Venus, and perhaps beyond. Earth will become uninhabitable. But conditions on the outer planets will also change.

My conceit is that the inhabitants of the third planet will use their moon, which had already been colonized, to start a mass migration to these outer planets. They will turn the moon into a ship, an ark, and use it to transfer all that is necessary to remake the outer planets, until they are capable of sustaining life. This takes a long time, but luckily they have

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a long time. But not an infinite time; eventually the home planet is incinerated, and most of its population destroyed.

During this process also, the inhabitants of the home planet have gradually separated themselves into two distinct classes, the "Starbridges," the organizers and planners of this great work, and everybody else. On the outer planets also there are two classes of colonists, and the moon which travels between them (or "Paradise," as it is called in the novels) becomes the power base for the dominant Starbridge class. Eventually life establishes a routine on the seventh, eighth, and ninth planets from the sun, and especially on the eighth, which has the roundest orbit. Its year is about 80,000 days long. It is inhabitable for all of that time, especially around the equator. The far north, where the novels are set, is subject to cruel climatic changes and is therefore more backward—vestiges of Starbridge power remain there long after the planet as a whole has assimilated it or thrown it off. Because that's what happens. On the eighth planet, the Starbridge elite is destroyed over the course of the millennia, as the colony prospers and its population grows.

On the seventh and ninth planet, however, life is more difficult, more dependent on infusions of technology, which the Starbridges can provide. The ninth planet, for example, has an enormous orbit, which for part of its year takes it out of range even of the new bright sun. The inhabitants need the Starbridge power intact, and need Paradise also; the eighth planet, therefore, becomes a waystation in Paradise's journeys between the seventh and the ninth. It appears in the sky at regular intervals, to resupply with food, oxygen, and water, and to offload garbage. Sometimes it uses the eighth planet to gather speed or to change direction, or will wait in orbit for certain planetary alignments.

The conceptual problem was, I wanted a star that was diffuse enough to keep its planetary rotations slow, and yet was bright enough to warm its outer planets, whose years were sufficiently long for my purposes. The red giant seemed to offer a solution, and yet suggested other problems, as most solutions do. In any case, that is the skeleton I started with when I was writing *Soldiers of Paradise*. The sugar rain,

as well as other minor details, I extrapolated from the theories of Tommy Gold on the origins of complex hydrocarbons—discredited now, but less so when I started work.

The events of the novel, though, begged to be written about from the point of view of someone who doesn't fully understand the cosmology involved, who lives in a country where even the Starbridge remnant (probably extinct at the time he or she is writing) had not for the equivalent of millennia retained anything but vague mythologies as to their origin. All the "supernatural" events of the novels can be attributed, in the same way, to the narrator's lack of understanding: they are either mythological and unverifiable Starbridge characteristics (such as golden blood, eyes that change color, etc.), or else misinterpretations of superior technology (such as Thanakur Starbridge's medical accomplishments, Chriam Demiturg's telepathic cord, etc.), which appear to the narrator as magical.

Some people find the books confusing and disorienting, and it is, I think, the effects of this narrative voice that they are responding to—my narrator sounds omniscient, but he is not. Much of what is plain to me, the writer, is hidden from him. This is frustrating for some readers who yearn for truth, but it was a necessary component of the voice I was trying to achieve. So much of science fiction is narrated by people who see courses and events clearly, and that often translates into a tone that strikes me as essentially unreal.

When people talk about "hard" science fiction, contrasting it to the ordinary kind, it is, I think, this difference in narrative voice that they are responding to, that enables them to identify what is hard and what is not. All competent writers work to make their facts accurate, their extrapolations believable. What sets hard science fiction apart is not that. It is a narrative convention that many readers find reassuring, that appears to provide them with absolute values of truth and accuracy within the confines of the story. They know what's happening; they know how the writer thinks and feels; they know how they're supposed to think and feel. It provides a welcome contrast to their own lives, and is comforting for that reason. In addition, there is something nostalgic about it. People talk with regret about the demise of old

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fashioned hard science fiction storytelling—it is not the science they miss, or the attention to scientific detail. In general, standards for that are higher now than ever. No, they miss the voice, and the journalistic prose which is the repository of that voice. They miss the sense of control, of absolute reality. They miss the clarity and sureness of atheism. And above all they miss a sense of optimism and potential that they associate with science—a faith in Darwinian principles, in the perfectibility of mankind.

Hard science fiction writers often speak of how much they distrust “literary” values and techniques, which cast a veil between the reader and the story. It’s as if the story were some kind of object which they are able to describe dispassionately—it’s ironic, therefore, that hard science fiction is distinguishable to its readers mainly by a series of stylistic conceits, and it is style that its readers are responding to, rather than content. Unambiguous morality, optimistic and decisive resolutions, unobtrusive writing, a concentration on action rather than interior life—all these are aesthetic choices. They are not inherent in any story. They are the elements of a literary style as artificial as Marcel Proust’s.

The essential artifice is that there is no artifice. And that’s true about science too, or at least about old fashioned conceptions of science. In this postmodern world, doubt and self-consciousness have taken over one academic discipline after another. We started out in

literature; most people are now resigned to the idea that judgments about the quality and meaning of a text are self-referential—that is, they explain more about the reader than about the work. From literature to art and from art to history—and again it is disorienting and confusing to realize that there is no master text. That there are no absolute values in history, no story that incorporates all stories, no objective point of view. That it is meaningless to try to determine what really happened.

Science is the last bastion of that kind of thinking. And people have flocked to it, at least in their hearts, as they have been routed out of other disciplines. It alone still seems to offer clear distinctions between fact and error. Many of its practitioners still feel that there is such a distinction, and that it is absolute and meaningful. And many readers of science fiction still respond to that faith; it is their God, the way Marxism or Jesus are Gods to others. The fixed point in a chaotic world.

In my own writing, I try to get away from that fixed point. My narrator in the Starbridge books sounds as omniscient as God, but he is not. Every character in the work has his or her own story, and the narrator has one, and God has one, and I have my own too. All are different; all are true and false. ▶

Paul Park's most recent novel is *The Cult of Loving Kindness*.

Mirabile by Janet Kagan

New York: Tor Books, 1991; \$18.95 hc; 278 pages

reviewed by Fernando O. Gouvêa

Janet Kagan's stories about the human settlement of the planet Mirabile, which are collected in this book, have been appearing in *Animer's* for a few years. They have been very well received, as has been demonstrated in the annual readers' poll conducted by Davis Magazines. This is perhaps a little puzzling: among all the sophisticated, literary, and critically successful stories chosen by Gardner Dozois for his magazine, it is these simple but pleasant adventures which come out as “favorites.” This possible reaction is really a mistake: though the stories in *Mirabile* are indeed adventure stories, they should be considered a real achievement, even in terms of literary science fiction.

The adventure story has always been a central part of the science fiction tradition, which has held on to it as it has held on to the short story as an important means of expression. While many sf adventures simply follow the mold of the old pulp adventure story, the real sf adventure is a little different: in it, the hero's most important trait is that he or she (in the traditional form it was of course “he”; in this book it is “she”) *thinks* correctly, knows (or, perhaps more commonly, *finds out*) what needs to be known and is able to act on this knowledge. This is the essence of the “competent man” of the Heinlein juveniles, and this is the tradition (one might call it the *Analog* tradition, if it weren't for the fact that none of the stories appeared in *Analog*; that they did not seems to say something about the current listlessness of that magazine) to which Kagan's work in this collection belongs. Were it still possible to use the term in approbation, we might call it Heinleinian. And within this tradition, these stories really shine.

Here is the setup: humans have colonized the planet Mirabile, getting there in a fleet of generation starships. Earth is by-and-large forgotten, except as a cultural symbol (everything “Earth-authentic” is good) whose reality is only known through bits and fragments of information preserved in the ships' computer libraries, which (of course) have not survived the trip in perfect shape. Because of this, the stories at many points offer us ourselves in a distorted mirror: facts about Earth are remembered incorrectly if at all, and many Earth customs are remembered only as “ship's manners” and not traced back at all. To spice up this mixture, Kagan adds the “gubds,” which are associations devoted to the memory of one or another Earth culture (usually in rather garbled form).

All of which is background to the central idea: with the colonists were sent vast stores of embryos and genetic material; it was expected

that the colonists seed their new planet with Earth life. As an attempt at redundancy, the genes in these embryos are specially coded so that, in the right conditions, their offspring will belong to another species entirely, so that flowering plants may produce insects rather than seeds, or deer may produce moose. Of course, this also opens the possibility of all sorts of strange and unexpected mixtures, known in the stories as “Dragon's Teeth.” Whatever we may think of the plausibility of such an arrangement, it becomes the main motor of the plot in each of these stories, as Annie Jason Masmajeán (or Mama Jason) has to deal with the complex interaction of the genetically hypercomplicated Earth life with its alien environment.

The result is adventure stories without “bad guys.” In each it is some living thing, native to Mirabile, “Earth-authentic,” or a garbled form of Earth life, that acts as the opponent, and much of the action is intellectual: the opponent will be beaten if it can be understood and successfully dealt with in terms of the ecology under construction in Mirabile. The only real human opponents are those people who are ready to destroy without thinking any plan or animal that is even slightly threatening. (This anti-xenophobic preaching is, of course, a very traditional element in this very traditional form of sf.) The general flavor is very ecologically concerned, with quite a few “ain't nature wonderful” comments implied or explicitly stated throughout.

The plots, for the most part, do work, though in some of them one gets the feeling that the solution has come about a little too easily. There are a few lucky accidents, the genetic technology presupposed is pretty much magical, and in many of the stories the “threat,” once understood, turns out not to be a threat at all. On the other hand, the victories tend to come through honest intellectual effort and openness to the facts. If indeed “chance favors the prepared mind,” then maybe the elements of chance are acceptable here.

What makes the stories work as stories, of course, are the characters that live them. It is here that Kagan seems closest to Heinlein. The main circle of characters includes Annie, her husband-to-be Leo, and the children who live together in a Lodge at Loch Moose (children in Mirabile are raised by professionals, rather than by their parents, and the Lodge is one such establishment). Both Annie and Leo are “competent people,” and a lot of their interaction with others is in a teacher-student mold. (Since many of the “others” are children, this does not ring as false as it does in some of Heinlein's worse efforts.) There is a lot of good-natured joking around, and an attempt at creating a chummy

camaraderie that for the most part seems to work (though it works better in each story than it does when they are collected, as here). The sexual element of Annie's relationship with Leo is understated and occasionally coy: they "neck" and give each other "full body checks," for example. It is probably here that the book is closest to Heinlein's juveniles (which is not a totally bad place to be).

Many of the stories are funny, as their titles would suggest ("The Loch Moose Monster," "The Return of the Kangaroo Rex"), but the tone varies considerably. The most somber, and the least successful, is the last story, "Frankenswine," where some attempt at closure is made by having a few of the secondary characters discover a way to turn off the "hidden genes" in the species from Earth, and so to end the adventures entirely. (It is left unclear whether the method will actually be used. . . I hope this does not mean that the author has sequels in mind. I would much rather have another well-thought-out world than more of this one.) The story seems much less successful than the others, perhaps because its real point, which is that discovery, happens backstage, while the story focuses on the capture and destruction of some rather dangerous animals (Earth-authentic wild boars and "Frankenswine," which are a blend of boar and mole). Of all the stories, this one

has the most overt physical danger and is closest to a traditional adventure story; perhaps for that very reason, it does not sit very well with the others. It is also the only one of the stories that faces up to the occasional need to completely destroy a species.

Mirabile seems to be intended as a "fixup" (a novel built from previously published short stories). The proof copy included no mention of the earlier publication of these stories (not even on the copyright page), and the jacket copy seems to studiously avoid the words "novel" and "collection" both. The author has provided one-page bridges linking the stories. These seem rather half-hearted, and rightly so: there is no novel here. While there is change and progress within and between the stories, there is no main thread of plot and no final apotheosis to tie it all together. Marking it as a novel, if done, will be merely a concession to the current of market, where most readers seem to dislike the shorter format. Taken as what it is, this collection of short stories is a notable contribution to the sf tradition, which deserves—and will please—many readers. ▶

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The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction by David Pringle

New York: Pharos Books, 1991; \$24.95, 407 pages

reviewed by George Turner

Not only is *sf/fantasy*—and all hybrids between—a mass production industry (let's not pretend that eighty percent of the stuff isn't ground out under factory guideline conditions) but it has spawned an auxiliary growth of books telling all about itself. There are serious, well-meaning surveys of *sf*, of "epic" myth-making and even horror stories, most of which leave me wondering who reads them and why. There are collections of essays, texts on how to write *sf* and *fantasy*, author biographies and autobiographies (God forgive my own guilt on this one) and assorted commentaries which, at the cost of whole forests of trees, leave not a ripple on the surface of responsible literature.

Then there are books of lists. What we have here is a book of lists. David Pringle compiled it. Why? The only reason I can imagine is that someone made him an offer no man with a family to feed could refuse. Now, Pringle's is a very respectable name in British *sf*; I just wish he had not involved himself in the enterprise.

Who will buy and read it? A glance at the title tells you that it is aimed at people who want to be told what to think. So much for "Guide." As for "Ultimate," that word will frighten all thinkers away. There is no such thing as an "ultimate" in any creative activity and *sf*, for all its sins of self-inflation and dollar-chasing, remains a creative activity.

A question remains: Can you trust this guide? My answer is: Not at all, because a trustworthy guide is a contradiction in creative terms—which is why critics disagree with each other.

Please don't say I haven't declared my stance.

On the cover is the claim: Descriptions, Reviews, and Ratings of over 3,000 Books!!!! (The exclamation points are not my invention.) Descriptions? Thumbail, yes, and pretty accurate as such things go but you can't get much on a thumbail.

Reviews? Well, yes—a single line chosen from a review to represent somebody's opinion of the book in question. David Pringle's opinion? Not too often; he admits he hasn't read all the books represented and his main outside sources, according to the introductory material, are John Clute and Brian Stableford, "two of my favourite sf critics." Alas, not two of mine, though Clute is a useful expositor of the more esoteric texts, so here is one reader who doubts from the start that the opinions expressed will help in a search for good reading matter. Since several dozen other critics are credited here and there (including, only once, yours truly, much to his surprise) the searcher after enlightenment will never know whether to trust or not, since a gaggle of critics can produce more diversity of "authoritative" opinion even on a bad book than you would believe possible. These reviews will help your selection

only if the critic named is one whose ideas you know fit roughly with your own.

Since Pringle gives no idea of the editorial grounds for or limits to critical opinion, the statements float, baseless, in midair.

There are other ways of indicating a book's possible interest for the reader but Pringle does not use them very much. The thumbnail description indicates category, allowing you to discard ESP, space opera, "high lit," or whatever does not appeal. The age of a book still in print after, say thirty years, tells you there may be something there worth disinterring. Prizes won are some indication (though not always) of positive value. Comparison with an author's other fiction can be helpful. These and other indications are sometimes present but not often enough.

One must guess that Pringle has selected what should be included, either in his opinion or that of his advisers, then sought a quote bolstering that opinion. You, as reader, may feel justifiably aggrieved at being too often led up somebody else's garden path.

But—if he has selected only the most highly commended works, shouldn't such choices be reasonably safe? Alas, not necessarily so.

After some twenty years in the criticism business I do not pretend to know what is "best" or "worst," "most entertaining" or "utterly boring." These summations are for the reader, not the critic. So you must choose your critic as carefully as you choose a friend and for the same reason—that he is in your estimation dependable.

So, given a chaos of opinion, what is to be made of the Pringle mode of sorting books in a descending scale of values as for a restaurant guide: four stars, three, two and one? (There appear to be several works in a fifth category, given no stars at all. Why include them?)

The four star category is, as it should be, the smallest; real quality is as rare in fiction as in anything else. Counting arduously through the pages, I located eighty-seven four-star titles—roughly one in every thirty-four of the entries.

I doubt that there are actually eighty-seven outstanding books in the entire *sf* canon, given really rigid critical parameters, and am taken aback an extra pace or two when I see that twenty-six of them are anthologies or author collections. I suppose there could be an anthology whose every entry is of top quality but I have not met with it. The same applies to author collections; a steady level of achievement over eight or ten items in the difficult art of short story writing is rarely encountered, and of all those cited here I might be tempted to agree with only one, J. G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*. This lavish handing out of honours smells, to this critic, more of wide-eyed enthusiasm than of an honest totting up of values. Six Ballard volumes of tales get

Michael Swanwick
Writing in My Sleep
(Ninth in a Series)

This is my final entry in this series. If it's been an eccentric series—and God knows, it seems so to me—I hope that you've at least found it entertaining. These pieces resting uneasily somewhere between fiction and essay, the most of them, were all written in my sleep and transcribed immediately upon awakening. For me, this is their chief charm, that they come from someplace deep in the brain that does not give a fig whether a piece will have the length or genre trappings that make it publishable, and yet still cares to create, and does so as well as it can.

This last dream, my most recent, is perhaps closest to the bone, the most ego-centric of the lot and, not coincidentally, my favorite.

"Storyteller Rock"

You ask me why I'm such a good storyteller. Well, I ought to me. I learned how from the Storyteller Rock himself.

The Storyteller Rock is as old as the hills, and he started telling stories before there were any ears to hear them with. He invented storytelling. He told the first story there ever was. Over the years, he made up all the stories there ever were or ever will be. He told them all. He told them over and over to himself until they reached their final forms.

Every story you've ever heard, he told it first. And he told it best.

I met the Storyteller Rock when I was a boy in Winsor, Vermont. There was a field out in the woods, and there he sat, just a little in from the edge, old and rounded and powdered white with lichens.

Down low to one side were three little holes, just big enough to stick your little finger into. If you brought him a cigarette, lit it and stuck it in the bottom-most hole, he'd smoke it down to ash and then he'd tell you a story.

I stole a pack of my mother's Chesterfields from her purse and fed them to him one by one, a story a smoke. When it was gone, I waited my chance and stole another.

At first the Storyteller Rock found it hard to focus on me. He had the long view. He kept confusing me with the last kid to give him tobacco, and telling the stories in Iroquois. But as the years went by, we got to know each other better, and he taught me a lot. He was a good teacher, but tough. He didn't take any guff.

I remember how he said, "Boy. You'll never be a first-rate storyteller until you learn to stop being so God-damned sincere."

Well . . . I listened to him.

And now I'm not.

this top rating while his other six get three stars. This is mere hero-worship; not even Chukov was ever that consistent. Certainly not Ballard. Such classification is woolly nonsense and sadly indiscriminate.

Pringle's treatment of the Ballard novels also gives some clues to his values. The moody, hallucinogenic disaster novels, *Crystal World* and *The Drowned World*, are each given four stars, while the three far more significant sociological novels, *Crash*, *Concrete Island* and *High Rise* are dismissed with three. It seems Pringle's taste leans to the exotically literary while perceptions of social and psychological importance rate lower on his scale of values. Some literary preciousness seems indicated, so let the seeker after unbiased judgement beware!

A selection from the rest of the sixty-one four-star novels may give rise to other suspicions.

1. *Frankenstein*. Why? Subservience to the sf Grand Old Literary seems the only possible reason. Despite Brian Aldiss, it is not the seminal work from which modern sf flows but is a gothic thriller with a religious subtext (Victorian fundamentalist), some ludicrous plot mechanics and some mention of Galvani to lend an air (specious) of credibility to the "creation" sequence. The writing is often psychologically muddy and much of it is lifeless platitude. Reverence for antiquity is not a criterion of excellence.

2. In the area of antiquity, Jules Verne is represented by 20,000 *Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. These hoary old adventures are O.K. for the kids to cut their teeth on but that's about it. We are grateful to our founding fathers but things really have moved on since their day. If Verne gets a laurel, why not More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*? These really are seminal works of sociological and technological sf and far more intellectually significant than Verne or Mary Shelley.

3. H. G. Wells is well represented—rather too well—with *The Time Machine*, *The War in the Air*, *The First Men in the Moon*, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. About *The Time Machine* one can only agree; nothing to equal its simple but astonishingly deep vision appeared until Strepdon's *Last and First Men* forty years later, but Wells's is the superior work of art. But *The War in the Air* is not

and never was sf; it dealt openly with matters which were already in discussion amongst the British, French and German high commands; it was a cautionary novel. (As usual, nobody listened.) The other three were groundbreakers in their day and though enjoyable have little to say to the reader. Pringle gives *The Invisible Man* only three stars, possibly because his summary, concentrating on melodrama, misses the point of the tale, that the gift of invisibility would be not a blessing but a disaster for the invisible one.

4. Coming closer to the present I note that Beresford's *The Hampdenshire Wonder* gets only three stars. It seems worth four to me because it is the one major superhero story which relates its protagonist, heartbreakingly, to the realities of life among ordinary folk. (Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, with its nauseatingly silly climax, gets four stars. You pays your penny and you takes your pick.)

5. There is, of course, no pleasing Philip K. Dick fans short of grovelling adoration but Pringle restrains himself to three four star items. What surprises is the comment on *Valis* (one Dick novel that approaches really top quality without resort to nonsense): "A moment to a mind that had pulled itself back together after struggling on the brink." That was not enough to earn it the fourth star. This comparative judgement business turns out to be a pretty directionless way, a matter of which way you are facing when the train whistles by. And Dick's one really daring work (in my thinking, that is), *Doors of Perception*, gets four stars!

6. Not many would cavil at four-star ratings for *Brave New World*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 1984, *The Dispossessed*, *Flowers for Algernon*, *The Inheritors* or even *Solaris* with its inbuilt central weakness, but it becomes very much a matter of individual opinion when one tries to rate such novels as *The Book of the New Sun* (gorgeous but ultimately pointless), *The Day of the Triffids* (nice adventure stuff, like a thousand others), *The Dismalised Man* (scientifically silly), *Neuromancer* (fascinating but ultimately empty), *Roderick* (funny as all get out but hardly profound in its commentary) or *Non-Stop* (Aldiss's excellent but hardly epoch-making "long voyage" novel).

Taste and point of view being what they are, this reviewer would have to create a new five-star rating to accommodate such works as Tom

Ditsch's 334, Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, Gene Wolfe's *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, Finney's *Time and Again* (Pringle gives it three against four for *Bringing the Jubilee*), Clement's *Mission of Gravity* (it's one true triumph in world building), and Budrys's *Ragnar Moon* (possibly the deepest probing of morality in the genre).

All of which serves only to indicate that comparative indexing is a waste of everybody's time. The only thing you can do with it is—quarrel with it. Since the standards of selection and gradation are never stated, what is gained?

There is no point in poring over the lower-grade entries. Devotees of Doc Smith will only turn up their noses at the humble one-star rating given the "Skylark" and "Lansman" novels and make snide remarks about crap-headed arty critics; what followers of Frank Herbert will make of a three-star *Dunes* followed by a series of two-star sequels I cower to think. (I found them barely readable but who am I amid a clamour of fans?)

You will have gathered by now that: a) I can think of no good

reason for such a book's existence, b) nobody in his right mind should buy it, c) compiler and publisher are making money at the expense of fans they regard as simple-minded suckers, d) that I don't agree with the published judgements and that e) you, the reader, need see no reason to agree with either of us.

Chauvinist Australian Note: Pringle has at least heard of Australia. Damien Broderick and I get reasonably well treated, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* earns a reverent genuflection and David J. Lake's excellent *The Man Who Loved Morlock* is granted three stars. I feel that only a certain stodginess in the writing deprived it of a fourth. Victor Kelleher may have been omitted because his books fall mainly into the "young adult" sector but there is no excuse for the omission of Lee Harding's *Displaced Person* (worth three stars in my estimation) which won a mainstream literary prize. How many sf writers can say that? ▶

George Turner's most recent novel is *Brain Child*.

Pandora by Holly Hollander by Gene Wolfe

New York: Tor Books, December 1990; \$17.95 hc; 198 pages

reviewed by David Herter

Gene Wolfe's latest release (actually written in the early 1980s and alleged to have been published in France several years ago) is his first mystery novel, but not the first time he has written within the mystery genre. His Sherlock Holmes pastiches, "The Rubber Bend" and "Slaves of Silver," were humorous and wickedly complex. "Cherry Jubilee" set its whodunit on a spaceship bound for Mars. "Detective of Dreams" was modeled on Poe, and solved its puzzle with a brave, unambiguous moral, while his masterpiece "Seven Ancient Nights," with its labyrinth of unreliability, forced the reader to assume the role of detective. Anyone familiar with these works would have high expectations for *Pandora* by Holly Hollander.

The title leads us to expect an exploration of the Pandora myth (after all, the archetype of mystery), while the fictional byline hints that Wolfe will once again examine the role of auctorial reliability. With such loaded guns in sight, the reader will expect a few profound discharges. Instead, Wolfe gives us his version of a Heinlein juvenile, introducing a plucky young heroine into a cerebral puzzle, resulting in a direct, modest, even mundane novel, notable nonetheless for its admirable lack of pretension, its narrative ventriloquism, and—a Wolfian quality to be sure—how un-Wolfian it appears.

Holly Hollander, our narrator, lives with her Yuppie parents in the Chicago suburb of Barton. Her father owns the town's premiere lock company, while her mother, a bored socialite, occupies her time by planning for the annual Barton Antique Festival. As chairwoman, it is her duty to locate a stunning rifle prize for opening day, a duty she fulfills with the discovery of a locked wooden box labeled with the forbidding legend *Pandora*.

The opening of *Pandora*, along with the resulting explosion, is the force that propels this mystery. Holly, who is injured in the blast, joins eccentric detective Aladdin Blue in determining what was inside *Pandora*, and who put it there. And as the investigation begins implicating everything from Holly's dying Uncle Herb to troubled Vietnam vets and WWI armaments, the pair meet their foil in the dour Lt. Sandoz, a cousin to *Free Live Pres's* Mr. Stubb (himself cousin to Chandler's Continental Op), who does not appreciate the efforts of teenaged girls and eccentric old men.

Though Wolfe toys with some mythological connections, Prometheus and Epimetheus aren't to blame as much as the avaricious motives lying beneath the surface of Barton. This lack of pretension serves the story well, helped by the bravura act of ventriloquism through which Wolfe becomes a teenage girl before our eyes, and any threat of archetype or metaphor dissolves beneath her breezy Val-girl speak:

I always shake hands with guys, because I can tell they like it, and afterward I went over and felt my father's hands because the ones I had been shaking felt so yucky (page 3).

And:

I'm not very big up top, but the shape's good. I have this little waist that I can nearly get my hands around . . . and good hips and legs (page 4).

I can't judge its accuracy, but there is an undeniable, perverse Wolfian joy in these lines, a sly act of shape-changing, and it propels the plot forward to a drawing-room finale, where Aladdin Blue and Lt. Sandoz advance several rounds of revelation.

As a whodunit, *Pandora* by Holly Hollander satisfies in its setup and denouement. The light-hearted complexities and appealing characterization recall "Cherry Jubilee," while the deliberate method of deduction brings to mind "The Rubber Bend" (though *Pandora* is lacking in that story's subtlety of wild scientific thought). What's missing are the ambiguity and depth that layer "Detective of Dreams," "Seven Ancient Nights," and nearly all of Wolfe's serious work. Even placed into context with his recent entertainments, *Pandora* is undoubtedly slim, lacking the madcap quality that made *Castleview* so entertaining, or the involutions found beneath the surface of *Thurs Are Doers*. And while these novels undeniably belong to Wolfe, his act of shape-changing is so complete in *Pandora* that it stands separate, ignoring the themes and tropes that resonate through his work.

We can't take Wolfe to task for writing a simple book, but we can feel disappointment from unfulfilled possibilities, especially when the bare bones of this story are so well suited to the exploitation of Wolfe's primary theme, that of narrative reliability.

Given Wolfe's adolescence, and the personal, twisted nature of the revelations, it would have been fascinating to see the truth in her account become hopelessly muddled, cryptic, and unsolvable. Like Benjamin Weer of *Pense*, her view of events would be clouded, hidden in the background. For example, it would prove impossible for Holly to depict the dialog and inner machinations of Lt. Sandoz, or follow the logic of Aladdin Blue. Instead of a plucky Heinlein protagonist we would be given a real girl, and the direct thrust of the novel would be more subdued, more realistic and rewarding.

Such ambiguity, of course, would render the mystery a mystery, and undoubtedly anger those readers unfamiliar with Wolfe's previous work. As it stands, *Pandora* should be taken as a wink, a sly smile from someone capable of genius, a bright bauble that might lure new readers to Wolfe, eliciting the same reaction as *Publishers Weekly* (10/26/90), who proclaimed "The town of Barton could well afford to sacrifice more socialites if doing so would bring this pair back on another case." ▶

David Herter lives in Seattle.

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When the Quest Ended

Continued from page 1

I had written—was to accuse Advent, my publisher, of bad faith and threaten them with a lawsuit, and to terminate his friendship with Earl Kemp, one of the SF fans who ran Advent, on whose couch Heinlein was used to sleeping when he visited Chicago.

I met Heinlein for the first and only time on a public occasion in New York ten years later, and by a substantial margin it was the oddest meeting I've ever had with another writer. First, while Heinlein was busy autographing books, I introduced myself to Mrs. Heinlein. She gave me the cut direct, turning her back on me and walking away. I knew that nobody does that anymore, but, by golly, she did it.

Then, when I had the opportunity, I introduced myself at last to the man who had been a stimulus, a model, and a hero to my younger self. Heinlein stood. His face turned dark red and a vein throbbled in his temple. (The stimulation of extreme rage was a mode Heinlein could assume at will, and which he was proud enough to recommend to others as a device for getting one's own way.) In a tone that brooked no compromise, he said, "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail!" and pointed the way to the door.

It was a surreal moment, completely out of proportion to any offense that I—a non-gentleman, perhaps, like all scholarly readers of other people's letters, but one who had never meant Heinlein any harm and never done him any—might have unintentionally committed a decade earlier. And all the odder it seems, too, when you stop to think that Heinlein was quoting Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War who, when the U.S. cracked Japan's most secret code in the days before World War II, had wanted to hear no more about it. Did he think he was playing the role of Stimson or of Japan, or somehow both at once?

So continuingly unforgiving (and skittish) was Heinlein where I was concerned that another dozen years later he would refuse to read through the relevant pages of *The World Beyond the Hill* before publication—but via Mrs. Heinlein would threaten the publisher, Tarcher of Los Angeles, with a lawsuit should there turn out to be anything in our book to which he took exception.

Two different publishers threatened with lawsuit. Two books published anyway. And no actual lawsuits . . . no reason for any. It is enough to set you wondering what Heinlein thought he was trying to accomplish, and why.

If it was to attempt to affect what was said about him and his work it would not have been the first time. Perhaps the most blatant example of this I know of happened to Sam Moskowitz back in the days when he was writing the earliest formal portrait of Heinlein and his work, which would later appear in expanded form as a chapter in his book *Seekers of Tomorrow*. As the climax of his research, Moskowitz sent Heinlein fifteen questions. And Heinlein was good enough to answer them all in a letter that was fully as long as Moskowitz's eventual essay. However, Heinlein then added the proviso that of course Moskowitz wouldn't use anything he'd been told. Caught in the monkey trap of wanting to be considered a gentleman, Sam was effectively prevented from saying even those things he had previously known. What's more, Sam actually admired Heinlein for this play. He thought it was a "clever trick."

There was a price to be paid by anyone who did transgress the rules Heinlein made, or who even disagreed with him. This was to become an un-person. Even before it happened to me, it was disconcerting to my younger self as I was handed along by friends of Heinlein to closer friends of Heinlein, to run into more than one dead end and a story that went like this: "It's true that Bob Heinlein and I used to be good friends. But then we had a disagreement, and as a result—through his choice and not mine—we no longer see each other."

I have an image of a tactically enraged Heinlein ever and again pointing the way to the door.

It is clear now that hiding behind various kinds of barriers, manipulation of what was to be known and said about him, and threats of extreme displeasure toward all dissenters were a regular pattern of conduct for Robert Heinlein long before he was plagued by the uncomfortable notoriety brought his way by the success of *Stranger in a Strange Land*. But why did he come to resort to all this officious dodging for cover, clever trickery and roaring threats? What could it be? The New York Review of Science Fiction

have been that he was so determined never to permit himself to hear?

Was it what Admiral Caleb Lanning ultimately did say to him?

Cal Lanning was the dedicatee (together with his wife and children) of *Beyond This Horizon*, Robert Heinlein's first published and most frankly philosophical adult novel. Lanning and Heinlein went way back together—all the way to their earliest days at the Naval Academy. They'd done everything together then, from chasing girls to making a private compact between them to keep on searching for the meaning of life. They called this aim "the Quest."

Eventually, however, when Heinlein had become an old man of vast and easily offended dignity whose mail was screened and who lived behind fences no hippie could penetrate, he and Lanning would fall out in a confrontation that had Heinlein thumping his cane, glaring at Lanning, and saying, "How dare you speak to me that way, sir!"

Now what in the world could Cal Lanning have said to Bob Heinlein that could have gotten him that upset? I didn't get the answer to that one from the person who heard this story from Lanning and then told it to me. But I've wondered about it. I have wondered.

After all, it is one thing for Heinlein to have brushed aside an important young fan critic like me, or to have brought a relatively recent friendship with a Colorado Springs mystery writer to an abrupt end. But the relationship with Lanning went back to the days before the money, before the fame, before the dignity, even before the SF writing. And how could you get miffed at this late date with the kind of running buddy you once attempted to join the Jesuits with when you both were young and foolish? The guy you sent a keeper copy of your first (and to this day still unpublished) long Future History manuscript?

What might Caleb Lanning have said to him that Heinlein couldn't laugh off but had to defend against with furious thumpings and glares and how-dare-you-sirs? It must have been something devastating.

But I was told one opinion of Admiral Lanning's that might fit the bill and be the heart-striving truth that Heinlein secretly feared to face—like that revelation of his ineradicable second-rateness which so devastates the strike leader in Heinlein's early story, "The Roads Must Roll."

It was Admiral Lanning's feeling that Heinlein had abandoned the Quest after *Beyond This Horizon*. If he hadn't said so, and hadn't said so, and hadn't said so, and then at last he said so, it seems possible that it could have burst upon Heinlein as an affront. And all the more intolerable because it happened to be true.

There is evidence of its truth in Heinlein's own letters. I mean by this, of course, the ones published after his death under the title *Grumbles from the Grave*.

As readers will already be aware—that is, all those readers who eagerly picked up this book for the same reason that I accepted a look at those Heinlein letters twenty-five years ago: the hope that his correspondence might shed some light upon the stories and upon the man—this collection of Heinlein's business letters, selected, edited and arranged by Mrs. Heinlein, is generally unrevealing.

There is one major exception to this, however. For whatever reason, the early letters between Heinlein and John Campbell that are printed here have been left relatively complete and unimproved by editorial handling, and now and again remarks are made that not only do give us some indication of who Heinlein thought he was and what he thought he was doing, but go a long way toward answering my puzzlement about how and why Heinlein came to go so wrong.

In Admiral Lanning's language, you could very well say that in these letters is recorded the moment when Heinlein abandoned the Quest. And admitted as much, at least one time.

The Robert Heinlein who first vaulted over the heads of all other writers to become the brightest star of the pre-war Campbell *Assimilating* was a desperate, driven, frustrated and unhappy man.

Through the Twenties and Thirties, he had pressed his Quest in every direction. He had studied engineering and mathematics. He had looked into Masonry and witchcraft. He had pushed beyond the miraculous into new dimensions of being with the writings of P. D. Ouspensky, and he had played around with the occult masters of Mr. Shasta. He had taken seminars in General Semantics with Alfred Korzybski, and he had even met his early hero, H. G. Wells, and asked him to autograph his cherished copy of *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

But none of these had provided him with the solution to the mystery of life that he was seeking. The nearest had been Wells. Heinlein's first

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Tom Maddox:

Cormac McCarthy, *Sutree and Blood Meridian*. A growing number of people believe McCarthy is one of the greatest novelists writing in English; I'm among them. His vocabulary is immense and always accurate; his evocation of person and place intensely detailed, moving, unsparring. In fact, it is very hard to sing his praises adequately without sounding hyperbolic or inflated.

William S. Burroughs, *Letters to Allen Ginsberg, 1953-1957; Queer; and Intermix*. Here are three documents from the time between *Junky* and *Naked Lunch*, when the style and form of Burroughs's later work came into being. The "routines" that are at the heart of *Naked Lunch* appear in both the *Letters* and *Intermix*, fully-developed at times, embryonic at others. Reading them and his commentary at the time is illuminating in at least two ways: first, it debunks the notion of Burroughs as unconscious artist; second, it provides an intimate look at how a major writer solves problems of form. Also, in all three books Burroughs gives us glimpses of the surprisingly vulnerable and wounded man usually hidden by the public persona.

Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. This is a remarkable biography, much better than one would expect a first full biography of Burroughs to be. It provides context for the books just mentioned and adds extraordinary detail about Burroughs's life. For hard-core Burroughs fans (as I obviously am) it is indispensable; likewise for fans and students of the Beats.

Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland*. This is not *Son of Gravity's Rainbow*, which surprised many people—though I wonder why, given Pynchon's usual swerve from book to book. However, it is a sly, funny book, Pynchon's report on the Counterculture (or Counterforce, if you will) twenty years after. It is filled with family histories and private victories and losses so is altogether more intimate than the earlier books. It's not a bad way to get into reading Pynchon.

Don DeLillo, *White Noise; Libra; Mao II*. He's a science fiction writer's non-science fiction writer, playing games of what *if?* and *if this goes on...* turning the elements of his culture back and forth to see what they mean. He's also immensely intelligent and funny.

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*. Behind the Ayatollah's hideous doings and the consequent tragic-comedy, there lies a very good book. It's about confusions of realms and intrusions of the miraculous and is funny and sad and beautifully written.

A. S. Byatt, *Possession*. Subtitled "A Romance," this is another Booker Prize novel, saturated with Victorian literature, history, and culture; however it's also very contemporary and knowing, so it gives the best of both worlds. I'd like to teach it or write about it in tandem with *The Difference Engine* to see what emerges.

A different set of books, not fiction and not for the faint of mind or the believer in simple ideas, simply stated: Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* and "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"; Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*.

Trained as a biologist, Haraway combines postmodernist feminist theory and perspective taken from *sf*—the result is rich and strange, sometimes stylistically over the top, but always interesting in ways that ordinary academics working within disciplines seldom achieve. Takayuki Tatsumi, ubiquitous in the American *sf* community a few years ago, has just edited a book in Japanese titled *Cyborg Feminism* that includes the "manifesto" along with an essay on Haraway by Samuel R. Delany I would love to read.

Eco is both forbidding semiotician and best-selling novelist (not a bad parody, duplicated to some extent by Delany, but the other way around). I like the way Eco's mind works, I agree with many of his conclusions, and I'm almost always happy to receive the benefits of his astounding erudition. In *The Limits of Interpretation* he argues for both "protecting" and "opening" texts. Many of the usual suspects of recent critical theory are brought onstage and made to speak (more lucidly than they usually do, for the most part, particularly with regard to Derrida), and their claims are set in a historical context reaching back to the pre-Socratics with extensive sidebars in medieval philosophy.

Lakoff is one of the major figures in the emerging field of cognitive science, and he is rewriting our culture's notions of what categories are and how they function. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* is his major work. For most readers it spends a bit too much time arguing its case against existing theories of categories; however it is one of those works that makes new wrinkles in your brain. After reading it, you will almost certainly think differently about how your mind functions.

Oh yeah, science fiction. Well, there's *Carmen Day* by Carol Emshwiller, which is about animals becoming women and women becoming animals; it's funny and strange as a drunken werewolf, and so are her stories. And there's Pat Cadigan's *Symmetry* and John Kessel's *Good News from Outer Space...*

answer to the challenge of the Quest had been to try to become a man of competence, an operator and director of society, a Wellfian Samurai. And he had identified this superior calling with his appointment to the Naval Academy and his commissioning as an officer.

But worldly power and recognition cannot be a complete and sufficient answer to the goals of the Quest—or else Genghis Khan and Hitler would be remembered today as sages rather than Chuang-Tzu and Jalaludin Rumi. And during the Thirties, the limitations of his first answer were demonstrated to Heinlein over and over again.

Heinlein was as competent a man as he could make himself—and where he wasn't all that competent he could puff and blow and fake his way through. But again and again he had tried to be a Big Time Operator, and time and again he had failed.

He hadn't risen in the Navy. Instead he had been retired when he was still in his twenties after developing tuberculosis. What a blow that had been!

He hadn't succeeded in graduate school and an academic career—again he had gotten sick and had to drop out.

He hadn't succeeded in mining or in real estate. In fact, he'd been a flop, and maybe even a fool.

Most recently, he had been rejected by California voters in a party primary election for a seat in the state legislature.

In the realm of action and obvious result, Heinlein was a total bust.

So what should he do? What were his brains and talents for? He had so much to offer, and yet he just couldn't seem to get anywhere at all. What was his life about?

It was at this point that Heinlein took up science fiction writing. It was an act fraught with ambivalence from the beginning.

From the moment that he had first discovered this limit-testing literature as a psychically-oppressed kid in Kansas City, Heinlein had read SF assiduously. It has been highly influential upon him—particularly Wells. SF had given him a basis by which to level himself out of the limitations of his Bible-thumping surroundings and become a seeker of truth. And that both he and Cal Lanning read science fiction in a society and a Navy which generally did not was a major bond between them.

At the same time, in contemporary America science fiction was not only looked at askance for its content, it was a pulp magazine literature, and the pulps were defunct. No matter how well-qualified Heinlein might be to become an SF writer, telling stories for the pulps was nothing at all like any goal he had ever set for himself.

Heinlein backed himself into doing it, however. He had the debt that he had incurred in his unsuccessful bid for office to pay off. It was hardly as much as a thousand dollars, but he told himself that discharging the debt as soon as possible was a matter of honor, and that writing stories seemed a way for a smart, science-fiction-savvy, but half-invalid fellow like himself to generate the money he needed.

That there was something disjunct about his taking up SF writing, however, something that he wasn't later able to look at quite squarely, is apparent in the tale Heinlein would persist in telling about how it came about. He would say that he wrote his first short story, "Life-Line," in response to a story contest in *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, the prize for which was \$50. When he was done, however, the story had seemed to good for a pulp, so he had submitted it to the slick magazine *Collier's*. When they returned it, he'd noticed that the pay rate at *Amazing* of a penny a word would earn him more than first prize at *Thrilling Wonder*, so he had sent it to Campbell who bought "Life-Line" for \$70. A clear win for Robert Heinlein.

The only trouble is that Heinlein didn't write "Life-Line" until the contest in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* was over and done with, and the winning story, Alfred Bester's "The Broken Axiom," had already been published. What is more, *Collier's* was never a market for science fiction stories, no matter how contemporary in setting or how well-written. It would seem that beneath all the misdirection and self-congratulation with which Heinlein came to laquer the event, writing for John Campbell's magazines was what he had actually had in mind when he set down to turn out his first short story.

And after a very brief apprenticeship, Heinlein found Campbell's range so well that he was able to sell him everything he wrote. All of Heinlein's scorching, all of his knowledge, all of his frustration, and all of his pent-up energy, he poured out in science fiction form. The Quest was written large in those early stories. Over and over they ask what does the man of competence and truth-seeking do? And what kind of society will allow him to do it?

At the same time, these stories themselves were highly frustrated. Again and again, they looked for an answer to the Quest at the level of the Samurai, the responsible caretaker of lesser men, and again and again they concluded with failure, breakdown, loss of nerve, even death. Heinlein would think of these stories as tragedies.

However, as successful with Campbell and the readers of *Astounding* as his stories were—particularly after the publication of a chart which Heinlein had been keeping on his wall revealed that all of the stories published under his own name were placed against a common background of future development—Heinlein himself continued to be of two minds about what he was doing.

Oh, the ambivalence he felt! Here he was, writing his passionate, powerful, questioning, revolutionary, and highly autobiographical stories. Story after story after story, as fast as he could get them down on paper. And yet at the same time he was ready to tell Anthony Boucher that he was only writing because it was an easy way of making money that he had happened to fall into, and that he planned to quit as soon as his debt was paid off.

Only, of course, he didn't quit after the debt was paid off. He kept on writing feverishly.

The ambivalence was written large in *Gumshoes from the Grave*. For instance, Heinlein would regularly bad-mouth his own stories to Campbell. He suggested that "If This Goes On—," his first serial, was back. And he said that "By His Bootstraps," his brilliantly original time

travel story, was hackwork, too. When Campbell protested that it wasn't, Heinlein insisted yet again that yes it was. "Cotton candy," he said.

At the same time, of course, this did not stop Heinlein from demanding Campbell's top dollar for his work, and declaring that if he got anything less, he would cease to write: "As long as you pay anyone a cent and a half, I want it. If my stuff starts slipping and is no longer worth top rates, I prefer to quit rather than start the downgrade."

And Heinlein actually would quit after Campbell rejected his story "Goldfish Bowl" in the summer of 1941. In a letter dated September 6, Heinlein told Campbell his reasons. And these were typically ambivalent, too.

For one thing, Heinlein said that he had grander, better paying and more ambitious writing to do. There was a book on monetary theory that he wanted to write, and another on General Semantics. He was going to write at least one non-SF novel, maybe. And he had thoughts of writing for the slicks.

But then, in almost the next breath Heinlein said that he was tattered out. In fact, writing all those SF stories hadn't actually been as casual and effortless a proposition as he sometimes made out: "Frankly, the strain is wearing on me. I can still write, but it is a terrific grind to try each week to be more clever than I was the week before."

And, in between, Heinlein protested that he had the Quest to attend to: "I want to be able to stop, sit down and 'invite my soul' for an hour, a day, or a week, if I feel the need for it. I don't know yet what my principal task in this world is, if I have one, but I do know that I won't find it through too much hurrying and striving . . ."

What was he actually going to do? That wasn't clear. What was clear was that now he wasn't going to write any more SF stories—especially if John Campbell was going to reject them.

Heinlein's quitting didn't last long. Campbell backed down in pretty short order, not wishing to lose his star writer, and bought "Goldfish Bowl" even though he really didn't want it. And just that quick, Heinlein relented. By September 25, not even three weeks after he had given up SF writing so firmly and finally, he was back talking to Campbell in these enthusiastic terms about an idea he had for a new SF story:

I think I've got it. Darned if I don't think so. The serial, I mean—the one I've been looking for. Like this—for some time I've been wandering around in a blue fog, trying to get a theme, a major conflict suitable for a novel-length S-F story. I wanted it to be fully mature, adult, dramatic in its possibilities—and not used before.

The idea itself was this: "In a world that is all peace and prosperity, what will men and women have left to struggle for?"

In this idea, Heinlein would find the nucleus of *Beyond This Horizon*, his longest pre-war effort.

For the next five or six weeks, Heinlein worked at getting the pieces of the story to fall into place solidly enough for him to start writing. He kept Campbell posted on his progress.

At one early point, Heinlein wrote to say: "I've continued research every day and have a stack of notes *three* high. I'm going to like this serial, I think." Ten days later, he was having to take a barbiturate to get to sleep at night because of worry about the story, but saying, "The idea is grand, wonderful, and I see more interesting angles to it every day." And another dozen days thereafter, he was telling Campbell, "I want this story to be high tragedy rather than horse opera—full of gore and action as a Greek tragedy, but tragedy in the Greek sense."

Here is enthusiasm, serious purpose, and high ambition. Yet as we might expect by now, when Heinlein actually got down to writing his dramatic, mature, and original SF story, he quickly took refuge behind his usual pose that he didn't altogether care about what he was doing, and wasn't really trying anyway.

In sending Campbell the first forty pages on November 9, Heinlein invoked a comic catchphrase of the moment (still echoing on today in old Warner Bros. cartoons): "Confidentially, it stinks." And when he mailed off the second portion on November 13, he wrote, "Here is another hunk of hack."

A hunk of hack? On pumpnickels? The very same story that aspired to be Greek tragedy in science fiction form?

In fact, *Beyond This Horizon* came out somewhere in between the two.

It wasn't anything as mediocre and many-times-envisioned as hackwork. But it was written too fast—in little more than a month. And it was awkwardly structured, straining to include pulp action and then lurching on determinedly after the pulp action ran out because Heinlein still had things that he wanted to get in.

Nor was the story anywhere near as concentrated and painful and Fate-determined as a proper Greek tragedy. And yet it was no negligible undertaking. It was both highly innovative as science fiction and Heinlein's purest presentation of his Quest. More explicitly than any other story in the whole corpus of science fiction, *Beyond This Horizon* would ask the purpose of human life: What should a man do? What is human life for? What action or knowledge can justify living and continuing life?

Heinlein's protagonist, Hamilton Felix, is a man of uncommon ability in a future society in which all material wants are satisfied. He is swift and smart and sure. However, his lack of one crucial talent, a perfect memory, disqualifies Hamilton from becoming an encyclopedic synthesist—one of "the men who knew everything" who direct this society.

Heinlein had first publicly proposed the work of synthesist in his Guest-of-Honor speech given at the Third World Science Fiction Convention in Denver in July. Heinlein had described synthesists then as "men who make it their business to find out what it is the specialists have learned and then relay it to the rest of us in consolidated form so that we can have, if not the details of the picture, at least the broad outlines of the enormous, incredibly enormous, mass of data that the human race has gathered." As a pioneer in this line of work, Heinlein named H. G. Wells—"so far as I know the only writer who has ever lived who has tried to draw for the rest of us a full picture of the whole world, past and future, everything about us, so we can stand off and get a look at ourselves."

When Heinlein had set forth his plans to write about monetary theory and semantics to Campbell in early September, no doubt it had been with this image of the synthesist in mind. By the time he wrote *Beyond This Horizon*, however, his original portrait of the synthesist as someone who learns and integrates relevant knowledge and then presents it to others for their own preparation and guidance had become conflated with his earlier image of the Samurai, the Man in Charge.

And if Hamilton Felix cannot be one of these masterful persons, what work is worth doing for someone of his talent and energy in this brave new future world? All that he can find to occupy himself is to design flashy trashy gambling games—"tully games for idle people"—and live comfortably. But Hamilton is a radically alienated man.

Various solutions to this situation are tried out in the course of *Beyond This Horizon*.

One is for Hamilton Felix to look out for himself and do only that which pleases him or makes his life easier. It is in this vein that he describes himself as "indifferent honest." Or, as Heinlein-the-narrator puts it: "His morals were strictly pragmatic, and conformed to accepted code as closely as they did only through a shrewd and imaginative self-interest."

Another answer briefly proffered is solipsism. In a trippy passage after Heinlein's characters have been rendered unconscious by a potentially deadly gas, there is a suggestion that this world is all an illusion, a crooked game: "It was always a little hard to remember which position Himself had played, forgetting that he had played all the parts."

This might be an intimation of Heinlein-the-author sitting up late at night after drinking too much coffee and taking too many pep pills, trying to force his story onward and grinning at himself in the mirror. But within the story, it is a strange and unsettling line of thought for Hamilton Felix to entertain, especially since only some of the persons of the story are acknowledged to have even quasi-reality. Of the rest, it is said: "That piece was an automatic, some of the pieces had to be."

But this view is only the conceit of a moment. It flashes upon the page and is gone.

Rather more space within the story is devoted to the huggenmugger of a revolt against the masters of society by conspirators who would enlist Hamilton Felix and give him a place of power and prominence in the new order. Instead, however, Hamilton recognizes these men for the resentful mediocrities they are, and actively works to subvert the revolution and see it put down.

And then, and then . . . after the almost-revolution has come and gone, in a portion of the story in which much time passes by in comparatively little space, the philosopher-kings of Heinlein's society resolve to address Hamilton Felix's question, "What is the meaning of life?", and to include him as an active participant in this "Greas Research" into the unsolved mysteries. He may not be a synthesist or a mover-and-shaker, but he can still live a fruitful life pursuing the Quest.

Here, a little forced, a little less than fully imagined, is an answer that is at least a half-step beyond anything Heinlein had previously proposed: To use the Quest itself as a Way and find meaning in the

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continuing search for meaning. And to make that search a fundamental societal project.

However, this answer—or its this-worldly equivalent—wasn't Heinlein's personal answer. He still was not ready to surrender his old desire to be among the special few who are privileged to guide and direct less able men and women.

That this was so was made manifest soon after Heinlein finished writing *Beyond This Horizon*. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii designed to wipe out the U.S. Pacific Fleet in a single blow, and the United States was suddenly an active participant in World War II.

Heinlein had been watching the war closely since it started in Europe in September 1939. And in his Worldcon speech in Denver, he had said: "I don't suppose I'll be writing very much longer. Things shaping up the way they are, I'll probably have other things that I'll have to do, a lot of us here will have other things that we're going to have to do, whether we like it or not; and I may not come back to it..."

Now on December 9, two days after Pearl Harbor, Heinlein wrote the following to John Campbell:

For the last eighteen months I have often been gay and frequently much interested in what I was doing, but I have not been happy. There has been with me, night and day, a gnawing doubt as to the course I was following. I felt that there was something that I ought to be doing. I rationalized it, not too successfully, by reminding myself that the navy knew where I was, knew my abilities, and had the legal power to call on me if they wanted me. But I felt like a heel. This country has been very good to me, and the taxpayers have supported me for many years. I knew when I was sworn in, sixteen years ago, that my services and if necessary my life were at the disposal of the country; no amount of rationalization, no amount of reassurance from my friends, could still my private belief that I ought to be up and doing at this time.

Heinlein wanted to be of service to his country. He wanted a ship under his feet, men to command, and a war to fight. That's what he'd always craved.

On December 7, as soon as Heinlein heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, he leaped up to call the Navy to tell them where he was and that he was available. (And next he called John Campbell.)

First thing the following morning, December 8, Heinlein presented himself at San Pedro Naval Base and demanded a physical. He was rejected both for his history of tuberculosis and for his eyesight. The Navy couldn't use him.

He persisted, however. He wouldn't take no for an answer. He tried one approach after another. He'd even tell Campbell, "I have been circulating around the offices of local naval activities, trying to find someone who wants me bad enough to send a dispatch asking for me. No luck so far."

For some weeks or even a month thereafter he would continue to speak of his expectation of "sea orders." But the hope would seem increasingly faded.

In fact, the last word had been spoken on December 8. The Navy didn't want him. And for all his pulling of strings, and prowling from office to office, and wishful words, Heinlein must have known it early. What a bitter pill that was.

All these months of carefully maintained ambivalence, all these months of pouring his heart out in fiction while telling others that his stories were only backwork and cotton candy, had been his way of maintaining his grip on his dream that the oncoming war would redeem all the wasted years and wrong turns and fulfill his training, fulfill his love of the Navy, and fulfill his Wellman Samurai self-image. And now it was all ended. He was never going to be what he most desired to be. He wasn't good enough.

How humiliating! How painful! In this moment of failure, rejection and self-loathing, Heinlein's feelings threatened to overwhelm him. He hurt so damned much that in order to make it stop hurting, he determined he wasn't going to care.

He turned against both the Samurai ideal and the Quest which

he identified with it, and in the most secret part of his heart, he resolved that henceforth—like Hamilton Felix in his initial phase of alienation—he was going to make his own whim and will his first concern. He would just please himself.

This negative dedication, this embrace of selfishness, found its expression in a letter to John Campbell dated December 21, 1941—just two weeks to the day after Pearl Harbor. Here Heinlein would acknowledge that Hamilton Felix's problem was in fact his own personal problem. Hamilton Felix can't be a synthesist—the one really important job in society. What does he do? But then Heinlein made it clear that he had arrived at a different solution for himself than he had for his imagined alter ego.

Forget all that he had just said about service and sacrifice. Forget about ambition. Forget about effort. Henceforth, Robert Heinlein was going to spend his life having fun.

Here are his words:

Some of Hamilton Felix's point of view is autobiographical. I would like to have been a synthesist, but I am acutely aware that many of my characteristics are second-rate. I haven't quite got the memory, nor the integrating ability, nor the physical strength, nor the strength of character [!] to do the job. I am not depressed about it, but I know my own shortcomings. I am sufficiently brilliant and sufficiently imaginative to realize acutely just how superficial my acquaintance with the world is and to know that I have not the health, ambition, nor years remaining to me to accomplish what I would like to accomplish. Don't discount this as false modesty...

I have just sufficient touch of genius to know that I am not a proper genius—and I am not much interested in second prize. In the meantime, I expect to have quite a lot of fun and do somewhat less constructive work than I might, if I tried as hard as I could. That last is not quite correct. I simply don't have the ambition to try as hard as I might, nor quite the health. But I do have fun!

The liar! The poltroon! The dastard!

Pardon me, but I just can't help myself. I have too much respect for the Heinlein who was my teacher and too much love for the Heinlein who was my inspiration to have either patience or sympathy with the lesser man who reveals himself in these paragraphs. Here we can see all the ambivalence of the previous months suddenly crystallizing into a future commitment to a lifetime of having fun and sliding by. Here is the Quest abandoned, and the first decisive step taken toward the critic-avoiding, anger-simulating, friendship-trashing, bombshelter-building, doom-warning, solipsistic old sybarite that Heinlein eventually became.

You say that I'm making too much out of this! One wormy, craven, self-indulgent, self-excusing passage in a letter written while in the grip of a severe disappointment in the midst of a dark December all those years ago couldn't possibly be so decisive, so final, and so irrevocable an act as to blight and corrupt the course of a whole subsequent lifetime, could it? Because if it could, then what might you and I have done to ourselves yesterday without quite noticing that we were doing it?

And I answer you—you and I had better watch our step, my friends. A devil's bargain is a devil's bargain at any time you strike one.

If you doubt that one was struck, imagine a different Heinlein, one who instead of resenting the bitter pill he was handed to swallow and reacting against it by determining to pick up his marbles and go home, had taken it like a man and drawn a lesson from it. He might have suddenly seen, in a way that he had never seen before, that being an officially designated Big Cheese didn't necessarily have anything to do with the Quest. And he might have resolved then and there that he was never going to rest until his society accepted the validity of his question, "What is the meaning of life?", and put him to work addressing it.

Or he might even have concluded that there was no point at all in looking to society for validation and approval, but just buckled down to the task of asking relevant questions and seeing where they led. What a

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Rachel Pollack:

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Gaia by Elisabet Sahtouris—Sahtouris is a professional philosopher and scientist as well as an advocate for the Earth and indigenous peoples. Her work on the Gaia theory of Lovelock and Margolis traces the history of the planet and the evolution of consciousness.

Techmicians of the Sacred edited by Jerome Rothenberg—one of several anthologies of "ethno-poetics." Rothenberg collects chants, poems, charms, and word/sound experiences from tribal peoples, and translates/presents them with the immediacy of experimental poetry.

Doom Patrol, a comic book written by Grant Morrison and drawn by Richard Case—Surreal, anarchic, perverse, Morrison's rolling genius brings us villains who talk in anagrams, an ambulatory, sentient (and transvestite) street,

a painting which swallows Paris, a hero whose origin story turns out to be the Charles Atlas 98-pound weakling ads from the 1950s, and the reason why the Pentagon is the shape it is. Pray that *DP* runs forever.

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truly interesting and admirable Robert Heinlein we might have had them!

At the very least, we could have had a science fiction writer who really tried, who didn't boast of working only three months a year, and who kept pursuing the Quest. This humbler yet more ambitious Heinlein, perceiving his work not as mere silly games for idle people, but rather as the contemporary equivalent of Hamilton Felix's participation in the Great Research, might have been capable of writing the truly adult, truly probing, truly mature SF that Heinlein we know once dreamed of writing, but then never did.

Beyond that, however, if Heinlein had lived up to all that he had proposed or claimed for himself in the course of 1941, we might have had a true cultural treasure, a human being as original, useful and funky as H. G. Wells. Like Wells, Heinlein could have started as a failure and a tubercular case, and made his initial mark writing attention-catching SF stories. And then gone on from there to invent a career for himself. He could have written his book on monetary theory. And his other book on General Semantics. And many more.

Heinlein could have been so persistent, so resourceful, and so imaginative in posing his questions about the meaning of life that our society finally had to sigh, surrender, and admit them into its sphere of attention. That's the kind of work that a synthesist might do, and it could easily have been Heinlein's work.

And what a benefit it would be now to our presently disoriented and devalued society if it had as a resource the questions that Heinlein once posed and then dropped about human meaning and human goals rather than the bloated solipsistic fantasies that he did go on to write!

It is true that in his letter to Campbell of December 21, Heinlein protested that while he would have liked to have been a synthesist, he just didn't have the knowledge, the memory, the integrative ability, the character, or the quality of genius necessary to do it. And that he wasn't interested in competing for second prize.

But this has to be Heinlein's greatest copout. His model of a synthesist was H. G. Wells, and Wells was no one with any obvious

advantages over Heinlein. He was a person who had conspicuous limitations in background, health, stamina, education, personal appearance and character. He was even given to speaking of himself as a man with a very ordinary brain.

Wells was no Wellman Samurai. He never had official recognition or a position that would allow him the right to shape society or to order men about. He just saw a job of work to be done of a nature that no one else saw, and did it. And the force of his agenda, the power of his questions, and his persistence in posing them made him a social force to be reckoned with in the early Twentieth Century.

Heinlein could have done the same—or, rather, as well. He had the questions, he had the ability (do you doubt it?), and he had a vision of the job of synthesist. And it is these things that are crucial—not some self-pitying phony baloney about perfect memory.

In the area of creative synthesis—completely self-nominated work for which there is no precedent, no job description, no qualifying exam, and, of course, no recognition—there can't be prizes, no first place or second. The work is all. And the fact is that Heinlein had the work in mind, but then elected not to do it.

Instead, however, he determined to hijack his gifts and his talents—which were neither good enough for the Navy nor sufficient for him to be a synthesist, but were quite good enough to ease his way through life—and then make a lifetime of pleasure for himself, erected on the firm foundation of his own second-ratedness!

What a burden to walk around with. No wonder Heinlein had to build his fences so high.

And no wonder, either, that Admiral Lanning could have pegged Heinlein's abandonment of the Quest to this very hour.

As an indication that Heinlein not only had made a wrong decision and knew it in his heart, but also felt that he had said too much, there is the evidence of his next letter to John Campbell in *Grumblers from the Grave*, dated January 4, 1942. Here Heinlein went out of his way to pick a fight with Campbell that was both so bitter and so falsely founded that if it did not completely end their friendship then and there, did such damage to their relationship that it would never again

recover its former closeness.

Campbell's offense was questioning the competence of the Navy high command in permitting the Pacific Fleet to be attacked in port and all but completely destroyed—a matter about which good men entertain their doubts even to this day. Campbell also suggested that Heinlein's thinking was compartmentalized; that while he could be thoughtfully critical about most subjects, he apparently could not be so about this one.

Heinlein's answer to this was to wave the flag, to accuse Campbell of attempting to induce doubt in him, and to threaten him with the authority and power of the law. He wrote:

As an intelligent and educated man, you have a responsibility to your less gifted fellow citizens to be a steady and morale-building influence at this time. Your letters do not indicate that you are being such. . . . It may not have occurred to you that I am a member of the armed forces of the United States at the present moment awaiting orders, for sea duty I hope. Such comments as you have made to me might very well damage the morale of a member of the armed forces by shaking confidence in his superior officers. There happens to be a federal law forbidding any talk in wartime to a member of the armed forces which *might tend to destroy morale* in just that fashion—a law passed by Congress and not just a departmental regulation. It so happens that I am sufficiently headstrong, tough-minded, and conceited not to be much influenced by your opinion of the high command. I think I know more about the high command than you do. Nevertheless, you were not entitled to take the chance of shaking my confidence, my willingness to fight. And you should guard your talk in the future. It might, firsthand, second-

hand, or thirdhand, influence some enlisted man who had not the armoring to his morale that years of indoctrination gives me.

I'll stop there because you have the idea. Heinlein didn't stop, however. He continued in this vein.

Compartmentalized thinking? Yes—to put it kindly. Can't? Yes. Bluster? You bet.

But then you have to ask why Heinlein might be afraid that his confidence and willingness to fight could be shakable. And why he was so adamant that the competence of the Navy high command should not be called into question.

Heinlein's sea orders never did arrive. He never fought in the war. And it never actually made any difference to anybody's willingness to fight that John W. Campbell and half of America thought the Navy brass had screwed up at Pearl Harbor.

Heinlein spent the war cooling his heels in Philadelphia, working at a job as a civilian engineer at the Navy yard which his old service friends had arranged for him and bullying a young Isaac Asimov, whom he'd convinced to work there, too.

After the war, for lack of anything better to do, Heinlein took up science fiction writing again. But he didn't submit work to John Campbell. And the stories that he did write were not about the Quest, as before, but about lesser matters like performance of duty, the recovery of lost nerve, and dying with a song on one's lips.

From there, he continued along the path he had laid out for himself in December 1941, until he became what he ultimately did become.

What an almost-great man that man was! And what a melloroney he managed to make of himself. ▶

Alfred Panshin lives in Burtonsville, Pennsylvania.

Candas Jane Dorsey Turtles All The Way Down

(Excerpted from *Our Changing World, the enquiry report by the World Times Insight Team, Chapter One, "Reality Drift: the history of reality fault research," pp. 13-19*.)

As we know, reality faulting was at first thought to be another kind of phenomenon altogether. The first *National Geographic* article was called "The Crack Where the World Closes"; it presented the facts known at the time, which were mainly about the gradual decrease in space being measured at certain locations. At that time the theory was sketchy and depended a great deal on a proposal that the phenomenon was due to the existence of a pair of minuscule black holes creating a long elliptical event horizon.

It wasn't until the following year in *Scientific American's* summary "Reality Fault Lines: A Geotemporal Survey," that the public became aware of an entirely new way of thinking about the problem.

Two scientists, physicist Mark Drainie of Canada and tectonophysical geomorphologist Alain Jerusalem of Marshall Islands Micronesia, had met at the Berne conference on the phenomenon, and discovered that they had been thinking along similar lines. Literally lines, for Drainie had seen the flaws in the ability of the black hole theory to explain the clearly-linear "cracks," while Jerusalem had been examining the similarity of certain aspects of the phenomenon with the tectonophysics of continental drift. They combined their thoughts and arrived at their preliminary theory of reality drift.

Drainie immediately began to work out the physics, and postulated that if he and Jerusalem were correct, there had to be another "crack," this one where the world "opened." In fact, Drainie felt sure that a network or "web" of such "cracks" had to exist. It was a breakthrough.

We do not know which of the pair coined the term "reality fault lines," but they first used it in their scientific paper "One Postulation Concerning the Phenomenon of Geotemporal Distortion in Coastal

France." By the time the *Scientific American's* reporter interviewed them, they were using the term fluently, and their initial excitement had calmed into a mature certainty.

The reporter, Carlyle Christopher, a British science journalist who before this had specialized in theoretical physics, remembers the pair as contrasting physically, but very similar in demeanor despite cultural differences.

Drainie was tall and his long, bony face revealed his Scots and English ancestry. His great-great-grandfather had been a famous radio actor, and his great-grandmother a radio journalist; his office walls were a mixture of his framed degrees and certificates with old, mostly black-and-white photographs of his forebears.

He was a boy designed for science. His mother and father had provided him with the best genetic counselling and early tutelage, and when he chose geophysics they, themselves scientists in the National Research Council Community, were able to get him a position in the lab of Francoise Suzuki, who was doing groundbreaking studies of planetary establishment and diametrics at the time. Young Drainie soon became Suzuki's star pupil—pun intended—and within five years was co-publishing with his mentor.

By the time the young man with the serious expression and the rowdy shock of brownish-blond hair falling above his eyes came to the International Conference on the French Problem in Berne, Switzerland, he had established his own lab beside Suzuki's and was the Canadian Community's acknowledged expert on geotemporal phenomena. It was natural that he should attend.

It was also natural that he should meet and, despite the disparity in their reputations, find common cause with Alain Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a young, inspired Kanak from Micronesia. His home area of the Marshall Islands was extensively used by the French for nuclear testing in the last century, and the effects have been devastating and permanent. Jerusalem's mother was a geneticist and her lifework was the rescue of organisms (including the human one) from random genetic mutation

caused by the Moruroa radiation leaks and Rangelap fallout. Young Alain was trained to be her assistant, but during a period of meditation and spiritual re-evaluation in his late teens he realized that his affinity lay within the earth, and he turned his studies to the complex geocology of the nearby oceanic trenches (from Marianas Trench in the north to the southern Tonga Trench), catch-basins from the tectonic material of continental drift.

Jerusalemly soon began to realize that the already-complex theory of plate tectonics was not complex enough—or simple enough, by his contention—to explain the behavior of matter in the fault areas. Extensive research in Victoria (Footnote: In Pacific Canada, where, ironically, he lived not half-a-mile from the Drainie family home, though the two young scientists never met; Drainie by that time was working in the East with Suzuki), California, Iceland, Sri Lanka and again in Pacific Melanesia served only to deepen his conviction that there must be more to learn about tectonic processes through the study both of tectonic style and deformation fabric. He eventually suggested that there had to be a fourth orthogonal axis against which tectonic processes must be measured, in order to explain the fringe phenomena he found in his field studies.

In positing this, he was at odds with the established geomorphological community, who had, after all, been studying the field for a century and a half. By the time Jerusalemly attended the Bernie forum, he was considered a maverick, and the solid respect accorded his earlier publications had been eroded, largely as a result of one paper in the *Journal of Earth Science* (which was at that time, it may be recalled, a rather questionable publication in the eyes of the scientific community).

In this paper, "Tesseraction at the Moho," Jerusalemly had suggested a link between continental drift and the "crack" phenomenon, but had not spelled it out. He had been sidetracked by the black hole theory, and spent about half of the paper examining a correlation, tenuous at best, between black holes and fault phenomena. However, in the second part of the paper, in much stronger argument, he presented his suggestion that the Mohorovicic Discontinuity extended into another dimension; this was bad enough in the eyes of the scientific establishment which reacted against the paper, but even worse was his suggestion that a mysterious Force guided the formation of matter at the mid-oceanic ridges, balancing it with the destruction of matter at the edges of tectonic plates. Later Jerusalemly claimed he was misunderstood, and that the force he sought was scientifically measurable, albeit holistic in nature—but the damage was done. In retrospect, we can see that his lack of knowledge of theoretical physics had weakened Jerusalemly's presentation of his theory, and misled him into taking the black hole idea too seriously, but at the time, the most charitable of his colleagues called his enquiries "mystical nonsense" while his enemies resorted to epithets like "bad science" and even the obviously undeserved "yellow-journalistic gloyomgonging."

In Bernie, Drainie read a paper criticizing the black hole/event horizon theory. Basically, in lay language, his paper suggested that in order to create an event horizon of such subtlety and linearity, the black holes involved would have to be sentient, capable of picking and choosing between different types of matter and able to deform their event horizons to do the work more expeditiously. Drainie felt other forces must be at work, forces undetectable even by Hawkinian physics.

Drainie's reasoning was entirely theoretical; it was scrupulously that only two days before, an event which was at first kept a closely guarded secret, the disappearance of the Breton child Judith Rochon—without her donkey, whom she had been riding at the time—had cast a shadow over the entire Hawkinian explanation of the "crack" phenomenon.

The introduction of the sentence/non-sentence question must have excited Jerusalemly, even though Drainie had approached sentience from a negative perspective. Clearly, however, Drainie had read Jerusalemly's paper, and even referred to it in his verbal introduction. Which of the two took the initiative in making the acquaintance of the other is not known, but one can imagine their first conversation: the small, dark, wild-haired, intense Jerusalemly and the tall, fair, diffident, but also intense Drainie. Scientifically and conceptually, each possessed the half of the puzzle which the other lacked. Their talk must have been exciting: synergistic, catalytic, accelerating with all the power of a

Recently Read

by Ken Houghton:

"Wordsearch," by Stacey Davies, *Pulphouse: The Hard-back Magazine* #6 (Winter, 1990). This story is fascinated with the form of text: literally, with the shapes and sizes of words. It is an adventure story: a trek through the wild jungle of letters, belles or not ("This was as far as she could go now. She wasn't sure what would happen next..."). Thinking of the splotch that is an asterisk as "upright spikes" is consistent with the story's rejection of letters and words as friendly objects; they take a pose of ethical neutrality which is, by definition, antagonistic. That the protagonist survives by her own ingenuity, in traditional *Asundering* fashion (indeed, because of her ability to recognize and maneuver through an unfamiliar environment) seems a conscious emulation of those "upbeat," by-her-bootsraps stories. The story showed promise of works to come.

Stacey preferred to read upbeat endings; the ending to her only published story, however, is ambiguous at best. ("The smell of ink the click of the pen and then...") Would that her own end were also still a matter of ambiguity; Stacey died over Labor Day weekend.

runaway shuttle, for by the end of each day of colloquium, notes toward a joint work which later became the celebrated "One Postulation" paper.

While abandoning the question of internal sentience as a red herring, the paper did note that external consensuality was a factor beyond the scope of current theory (though certainly suggested by Schrödinger's Cat), thus leaving plenty of room for the later exploration of this promising side avenue. The main body of the paper, however, was concerned with simply defining the problem in clear mathematical and physical terms. Jerusalemly and Drainie arrived at a simple, elegant definition of the nature of both reality and reality faults, a definition which has been extended but not excelled to this day. They also generated the economical terminology which is still used by the scientific community, if not the press, to describe reality phenomena.

Within the next few months after the publication of this first paper (also in *Journal of Earth Science*, the only journal that would accept it, "cracks" began to nibble at the ends of more land masses, including northern Vancouver Island in Canada, the North Island of New Zealand and southern Florida. Several wild phenomena were suddenly explained, including the gradual decrease of the numbers of a certain pod of protected orcas in Georgia Strait (previously attributed to covert racial violence) and the centuries-old history of marine disappearances in the so-called Bermuda Triangle. Drainie and Jerusalemly were solemnly jubilant as respected journals which had previously turned down their work began to approach them for new papers. (Footnote: It is to their credit that Jerusalemly and Drainie continued to publish much of their work in the *Journal of Earth Science*, whose reputation as a consequence has been considerably transformed.) Suddenly their "web" theory became mainstream; the events occurring were fully explainable by their postulations and in some cases followed their predictions to the letter.

Furthermore, with the increased number of data, the two were able to go further, predicting the exact positions of the major "opening cracks", or, as Drainie and Jerusalemly had called them, "reality creation faults." There were three main faults: one beginning in the Hebrides of Scotland, making south from Callanish through Iona to the Giant's Causeway in Ireland, then curving south and east across Wales and southern England, to close near Offington; one splitting the central North American desert from Cereel in southern Alberta along straight south to the Painted Desert in Arizona; and the longest of all stretching from Ayers Rock in Australia in a long smooth northwest arc to Xainza, a remote point in Tibet. (Other smaller

faults, including the African Reality Rift and the Machu Picchu/Tititaca Rendija) were eventually mapped by teams of junior researchers from the D-J lab, but the team leaders concentrated their initial efforts on these three main lines of forces.)

However, it was almost three years before the pair was able to verify, with the help of brilliant French ecotectonic geophysicist Louky Vonarburg and a team of Australian scientists led by John Tom, that new matter had appeared at the "opening crack" (as the press continued persistently to call it) north of Ayers Rock. Imagine in that gaudy landscape the sudden vindication both the foreign scientists and their aboriginal co-workers must have felt when, for the first time ever, a piece of the Dreamtime was quantified.

(Footnote: Certainly John Tom found it a life-changing experience; he gave up his laboratory studies, became his tribe's shaman-artist, and eventually disappeared into the outback. The official explanation was that he went walkabout, but his people continue to insist that it was to Dreamtime he went. Verification of his whereabouts is at this time outside the scope of available science, and also of this report. The *Insight* Team leaves it to other investigators to explore Tom's story.)

After similar research at Callanish and Brooks, Jerusalem and Drainie were able to extend their mapping of the web. For the next few years their efforts were concentrated on developing a unified theory of reality generation and cessation that would include all the recorded cases of disappearance and generation. To explain the different natures of the various faults or "cracks," they developed a classification system based on types and amounts of matter appearing and disappearing, measured along a comparative time-scale. In a sub-theory looking at the different fabric patterns at the reality cessation faults, they used as an analogy the geomorphological classifications of concordant and discordant coastlines. Their pioneer work into the interrelationship between free will/intention/desire and the reality fault web further extended the field of enquiry. Louky Vonarburg became the head of a separate team which is still involved with explorations of Drainie and

Jerusalem's speculations in this area.

Now, of course, the original theories of the two researchers have been, by and large, fully vindicated. After the physics had been verified externally by years of empirical work, it was a logical next step to do further study within one of the faults itself, study which is now, of course, underway. From that research Drainie and Jerusalem will derive the data which they can use to extend the physics. Notes found in Drainie's papers, and prepared by Louky Vonarburg for publication after his departure, indicate that he feels there is, within his grasp, a universal field theory which will unite Newtonian, Einsteinian, Hawkinian and Drainie-Jerusalemian space.

Drainie left the final choice of a research site to Jerusalem, who chose the New Zealand reality cessation fault near his home. Their entry point was Parengarenga, 190 kilometres north of Whangarei on the north island, where almost a half-kilometre of the main waterfront/street has already disappeared. On July 17 of this year, using the "crack"-detection equipment developed for them by Minolta, the two scientists were able to enter the fault.

There is little we can learn about the progress of Drainie and Jerusalem until they contrive some way to send their reports back to us. (Footnote: It is an attractive speculation to imagine a meeting of Alain Jerusalem, Mark Drainie, Judith Kochon and John Tom. Breton French is close enough to Canadian and Micronesian dialects for the newcomers to communicate with Judith, who by now must be eager to hear her own language again, while the reunion of Tom with his former colleagues would most certainly be a joyous one. However, in the bewildering space/time-scape into which our researchers have stepped, who knows what laws of affinity apply?) Meanwhile, the worldwide scientific community continues to study the spreading web of reality faults, and new understandings are arrived at daily. ▶

Candis Jane Dorsey's most recent book is *Machine Sex, and Other Stories*.

Griffin's Egg by Michael Swanwick

London: Legend, 1991; £9.99; 101 pp.; illustrated

reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

The moon is a griffin's egg, packed with nuclear-energy powered mining, weapons factories; and a workforce of some four thousand humans. At a time of slightly rejigged global politics, but not too far removed from our own era, the international arms industry has moved out here en masse, for safety, security and public hygiene. Inexorably, the garbage and the stink of megadeath creeps out of Bootstrap City to despoil a last, most pure and inaccessible wilderness.

Swanwick's story seems at first a straight fable for headbanged postgrads. Many of the weapons-industry "components," like the protagonist Gunther Weil, are refulsunks of some kind, in flight from the hateful developments at home. Gunther is aware of the sickening irony of his position; but he lives with it. Others, like the nerdy young Krishna, who works in "Self Replicating Technologies" are all too believably oblivious. They don't make the connection, these bright young men and women. They just want to have fun in the lab. To have the most fun, naturally, you have to go where the money goes.

Armageddon erupts and takes, on the moon, a suitably futuristic form. "Schizomimetic" neurotransmitter engines are released into the air supply. All but a (possibly) random few of the four thousand humans in charge of this vast weapons dump are rendered incapable of coherent thought or action. In the lifeboat drama which follows the sabotage, Gunther's lower, the high-powered and remarkably selfless Ekaterina, takes over and tries to keep order. The crazies get in the way, the rest of the sane degenerate morally in time honored fashion. Gunther—teacher's pet—is caught between.

Meanwhile, if the human world isn't destroyed utterly by this final war, still (we are told) everything will have changed. The schizomimetic engines are a minor by-product of Self Replicating Inc.'s total control over all neuro-psychological functions. For the first

time—claims Krishna, the archetypal labcoated innocent—human individuals will be able to write themselves the personality they desire.

Though the technical detail is characteristically slick and intelligent, the scenario for Michael Swanwick's novella has a vaguely dated feel. These neurotransmitter engines, which "hang around indefinitely," run the risk of seeming as impracticable as old fashioned anthrax. It's not that one doubts the stupidity of weapons-developers, but the technical hitch is obvious, and is tackled too late by a sudden burst of vital information. And there's a sense anyway that the "genuinely effective brainwash gas" is an old and crude idea that's been recycled too often.

It's not that one doubts the weapons industry's lasting clout or financial power either. But lunar development is on a scale that seems unlikely in any foreseeable future of ours. There is a distinct disjoint between this optimism and the nineties-guilt with which the story is laden. Perhaps this is intentional. Taken at face value, the displaced ecocriticism becomes puzzling. If there's "harsh beauty" in the pristine lunar landscape surely it's no different, morally or aesthetically, from the "harsh beauty" of a pile of mine tailings. . . . However, when Self Replicating Technologies Inc. moves in on the last frontier, it becomes clear that Gunther has been in mourning (though he didn't know it) for the demise of the untamed wilderness inside his own skull.

But is he right to mourn? The novella opens with sunrise and closes with a sunset, and is threaded through with a pitiful longing for lost sacred rhythms. The moon's human dead are buried, Christlike, on stone tablets in caves cut in the rock: one of many images in some kind of final holiness, threatened by machine-made, lifeless forces. Yet alongside the *nostalgia de la boue* Swanwick has placed continual reminders of the meat-machine nature of humanity. Gunther—like all his friends—is already an automaton of emotions and appetites, no more than a semi-

conscious ape. Perhaps the race truly is on the brink of real autonomy at last.

There's definitely a flaw in Krishna's argument. Human beings have always had the power to change themselves. What they're short of is the inclination. All that's going to happen—when the smoke of war clears—is that the final bastion of self-determined labor is going to fall to capitalism. Neuro-psychological self-control—speeded up, standardized and repackaged—is going to be industrialized out of the hands of the individual, sold as a product or imposed by a bureaucracy. And it probably won't even work . . . not after market forces get at the technical specifications.

While Gunther is failing to come up with this analysis, peace unexpectedly breaks out. There is a late flurry of plotting over the missing antidote and the identity of the saboteur. In a rushed and confused climax, Gunther finds himself (the victim of some ruthless auctioneer's wind-up) faced with a split-second decision between noble (and sexy) Ekatarina and the machine-finished salvation offered by Krishna the nerd.

Gunther chooses to kill his lover and settle for the self-as-product, ostensibly for the good of humanity; arguably just for the sake of being liked by his buddies. The tragic resolution has been signalled from the start: the case was always hopeless. By the end of Swanwick's brief, packed 101 pages, it seems the beginning and not the end of the

argument. The interesting questions are left unanswered.

*He had been lashed to the steel of consciousness and forced to ride
is wherever it went, and that nightmare gallop had brought him
only pain and confusion. Now that he had control of the reins, he
could make this horse go where he wanted.*

But who is this "he" who rides? How is "he" separate from his steed? And where is there left for "him" to hide now?

There's another more banal question of economics. *Griffin's Egg* is fine science fiction: and the depth of my questioning only goes to prove that. But Swanwick's dense telling of a simple story strains the novella form. Compression in the later passages comes out looking like an unresolved contest between the complex, untidy realism of a novel, and the crystalline shortcuts of a short story. Is the £10 hardback novella—not particularly enhanced here by a few blurry black and white illustrations—really a good idea? In many ways, it strikes me that *Griffin's Egg* is looking for a complement, a tangent to this black and white. Either/Or. For the reader's financial and aesthetic satisfaction, maybe stories of this length should always be published in pairs. ▶

Gwyneth Jones lives in Brighton, England.

The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fourth Annual Collection

edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling

New York: St. Martin's, 1991; \$27.95 hc, \$15.95 tp; 607 pages

reviewed by Debbie Notkin

Reviewing *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fourth Annual Collection* (or any other annual collection) presents an aesthetic problem. Presumably readers of *The New York Review of Science Fiction* must be satisfied with the following assessment: "Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling have once again produced the definitive volume surveying the fantasy and horror field for the year. If you are at all interested in horror or fantasy short fiction, you must read this book." If that's not enough, where does the reviewer go?

We have no good forms or styles for approaching anthologies critically. Most reviewers give up entirely and provide lists of their favorite and unfavorable stories, with three or four pithy, quotable words about each one. The more ambitious look for thematic connections, comparisons with other anthologies, historical trends. But the thematic connections in *Best of the Year* anthologies had best not be too strong, and there are no other definitive fantasy anthologies for 1990. Historical trends might be interesting, but I haven't read the previous volumes in this series cover to cover.

Any anthology must function simultaneously on two levels: first, it is a concatenation of stories, each written to stand alone, each theoretically memorable in its own right; second, it is a single book, bound by artwork, front and back matter, editorial selection, editorial control over the order of the stories, and any introductory material for the individual works. *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* is uncommon among anthologies in having two separate editors, with two different but overlapping fields of interest and expertise, who tell the reader which editor chose each story and which stories were joint choices.

A traveler in fantasy social circles comes to the book with previous knowledge of each editor. As fiction editor for *Omni* magazine, Ellen Datlow sees almost all of the best short fiction in the field. She is in an unchallenged position to shape the genres in which she buys stories. Her eye and ear for the horror story is precise and very fine. Terri Windling is quite simply the most skilled and diverse editor the fantasy field has had in the last decade. She is close to single-handedly responsible for the new and burgeoning field of urban fantasy, as well as that genre which Donald G. Keller has referred to in these pages as "fantasy of manners." Jim Prentice, who creates and packages these volumes, has a long history of providing fine reading to the fantasy and science fiction buyer.

Having thus set the stage, let's look at the book. Aside from the

highly informative front and back matter which is a given with the *St. Martin's* Best of the Year anthologies, and the predictably stunning *Tom Canty* cover, it contains 51 pieces: one essay, five poems and 45 stories. Three of the stories are translated into English (original languages Japanese, Czech and Spanish). Reading the book I felt that fantasy was outweighing horror: a count reflects the truth of the impression. Twenty-eight pieces were chosen by Windling, eighteen by Datlow, and five bear the imprimatur of both editors.

While reading the book, I was struck by one recurring theme and one surprising lack. The recurring theme is a known preoccupation of Windling's as well as a highly visible contemporary interest—unhappy childhoods and the role fantasy takes in healing. Several of the stories on this theme were bought by Datlow. The stories in this group are among the strongest in the book, beginning with the Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Coming Home" and moving through Kristine Kathryn Rusech's "Harvest," Susan Palwick's "Offerings," Elizabeth Massie's unforgettable "Stephen," and several others.

What's missing is the splatter, blood-and-guts kind of horror which Datlow has certainly been known to buy in the past for *Omni*, for her theme anthologies, and for this volume. David J. Schow's "Not From Around Here" is somewhat splattery, as is K. W. Jeter's "The First Time," but both depend much more on human interest than on gore for their horrific effects, and both demonstrate that pinnacle of authorial perceptiveness which makes horror really work. In place of special effects, Datlow has selected tales of personal interaction, including such shivery gems as "Stephen" (mentioned above), "Bessie" by Michael Blamlein, where the special effects are all offstage in the manner of Greek tragedy, and "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," by Jack Womack.

When humor is associated with fantasy, most people think of cute elves and funny little demons granting poorly phrased wishes. Windling has transcended the expected and found two hilariously funny stories, both way out of the normal run: Ian Frazer's "Coyote v. Acme," in which the Chuck Jones animated characters go to court, and Garry Kilworth's "Truman Capote's Trilby: The Facts." And while the topic of Joyce Carol Oates' "Ladies and Gentlemen" is deadly serious, the presentation is jocular enough to provide that oddity, a successfully funny horror story. Other mood shifters in this volume include Susan Cooper's fine essay "Fantasy in the Real World" and R. A. Lafferty's

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meditative "The Story of Little Briar-Rose, A Scholarly Study."

Lovers of traditional fantasy and horror need not fear. Thomas Ligotti's "The Last Feast of Harlequin" is an open homage to H. P. Lovecraft. Ligotti's craft far outstrips his predecessor's, but the mood rings perfectly true. John Morressy's "Timkeeper" is a standout story of a magical curio shop raised to its final form; Delia Sherman's "Nanny Peters and the Feathered Bride" feels like an authentic folk tale of the American South; Ian R. MacLeod's "Green" captures the feel of Victorian fairy tale and nonetheless has a very contemporary flavor.

Turkeys! Sure, one or two, out of more than fifty. None come to mind looking at the table of contents; who can fault an editor for buying a minor John Crowley story ("Missolonghi 1824"), even if it doesn't

stand out among its companions? And if Charles de Lint's "Freewheeling" isn't strong enough to open the book, nonetheless it probably deserves to be included. Jonathan Carroll's "The Sadness of Detail," which ends the book, is more than strong enough to hold its position. Concluding the book with a story so involving, fresh, and disturbing that the rest of the contents are hard to recollect despite their own strengths.

Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling have once again produced the definitive volume surveying the fantasy and horror field for the year. If you are at all interested in horror or fantasy short fiction, you must read this book. ▶

Debbie Notkin lives in Oakland, California.

Neither Blind Nor Just *Blind Justice* by S. N. Lewitt

New York: Ace Books, 1991; \$4.50 pb; 265 pages

reviewed by L. E. Modesitt, Jr.

In its simplest terms, *Blind Justice* is the story of a junior crew member of a space trader whose life is destroyed and whose home planet is enslaved by the Justicia—the future equivalent of a cross between the IRS and the British East Indian monopoly—or worse. Justifiably, he in turn seeks revenge on the Justicia.

Emile Saint-Just is on his first voyage on the *Marie Damned*. The *Marie Damned* is a blockade runner from the French-colonized planet of Beau Soliel trying to avoid the newly-imposed confiscatory regulations and customs duty of the Justicia.

The ship's cargo is sadce senin, a banned chemical/hallucinogenic drug whose use also allows the Syndicat members to interface with the AI systems of the ships and the Syndicat itself, thus providing the Syndicat with a competitive edge. After the *Marie Damned* is intercepted, the crew is sentenced to serve time on Justicia interstellar ships or outposts.

Because Lewitt does not employ "magical" warp drives, the effects of real-time relativity persist. It takes time to cross the stars, and such time lapses twist throughout the book. For example, Saint-Just's sentence is ten years "subjective"—meaning that nearly sixty years have passed on his home planet of Beau Soliel before he returns. When he again sets foot in the city of Huit Fleurs, the capital of Beau Soliel, he finds it under the hand of the Justicia with the once-independent Syndicat infiltrated and commanded by a tool of the Justicia.

What is impressive about *Blind Justice* is not the basic situation, for there have been tyrants and traitors throughout history and fiction, or even the off-beat ending, but the consistency of the semi-decadent culture of Huit Fleurs. From virtually every page seeps the gritty reality of a city where, after the Justicia has fired the senin plantations, the inhabitants flood their streets to continue growing the carnivorous sadce plants that produce senin.

Beau Soliel—the name refers to the violet sunlight which is so unique that the sadce flowers can grow nowhere else—is a proud, insular French society, sinking into decay even as its few cities sink back into the oceans. The Académie Française also has a role within the book, ensuring that the French language and culture will remain stable—allowing the star traders of the Syndicat to return to a culture they can recognize and where they can at least communicate although objective decades pass between their landfalls.

Lewitt's descriptions are so matter-of-fact that the odor of that perfumed decay permeates the book, yet there is an energy that suffuses some of the characters—primarily the women. While Emile Saint-Just is understandably old before his time, his rage at the Justicia subsidizes perhaps too rapidly under the admittedly cumulative betrayals he suffers. The characters with energy all appear to be women—Anne-Sylvie, Paulie Tree, and the mysterious Nathalie, and even the feminine personae of the AIs.

Another fascinating element is the orgasmic nature of knowledge, 18 The New York Review of Science Fiction

as illustrated in the senin-induced interactions between Saint-Just and the Syndicat AI system. Lewitt shows all too clearly the gut-level addiction of knowledge and its sensual/sexual power. Forget the senin; it's only the tool. Pure knowledge has a sexual force to those who can indeed absorb it—and the consequences of tying knowledge to sexual drives can be truly horrifying.

Yet here, too, an unresolved question arises. Virtually all of the knowledge/orgy scenes involve men. Lewitt never seems to address directly whether women receive knowledge in the same brutally sensual manner as men do. Paulie Tree, overdressed on green senin and tied to the control couch of the *Marie Damned*, absorbs and shares knowledge with the AI—feminine for her as well as for the men—but is "absent" at the orgasmic moment.

The "reality" of this knowledge/sex interface is clearly described in the scene where Emile meets "Claude," the Syndicat AI, who shields him from the persons of the intruder Justicia security programs, then "seduces" him with the knowledge he seeks. This and other scenes seem to echo Deborah Tannen, the psycholinguist who wrote *You Just Don't Understand*, whose studies indicate that men use knowledge primarily in pursuit of power. Certainly, Lewitt seems to reinforce the idea that for men knowledge is power and that "power-knowledge" has sexual overtones.

When William Gibson hints at those overtones in *Neuromancer*, for Gibson knowledge is more the drug with the absolute high without the sensual/sensual overtones. Which vision may be more correct? Perhaps that's an individual decision, although, while Gibson's logic seems more correct, I have the feeling that Lewitt is closer to human nature.

The women in *Blind Justice* seem to view sex and/or power as tied more directly to life itself. Certainly, Anne-Sylvie and Nathalie, the almost autistic daughter of the Quartier's most influential financier, exhibit a more direct linkage—for them, the ability to deal death has direct sexual overtones, as illustrated in Anne-Sylvie's second meeting with Saint-Just where she uses a "soft-knife" on his throat.

There is also an undercurrent of whoredom—the Justicia AI that condemns Emile is referred to as judge and whore; Claude, the Syndicat AI, certainly embodies whoredom, even as Anne-Sylvie does. Even in the last scenes, there is an almost-irrelevant mention of a half-wit whose car is executed—and that mention makes it relevant.

While fascinating, the book is not without flaws. The character of the prime revolutionary, Hugo Gorvitz, though outlined in depth, left me somehow unconvinced, while more minor characters seemed far more real. In the end, the most fully realized character is the city of Huit Fleurs, with its flooded streets, crumbling buildings, and senin-scented air.

The book's cover, while striking, is also slightly off-key. Though factually correct in representing the Quartier du Paris of Huit Fleurs, neither the hulking ship hull in the background nor the militarily-

clad figure, presumably Saint-Just, have much relevance to the book itself. Saint-Just is scarcely the pouting military pilot portrayed on the cover, nor is that figure recognizably close to anyone else in the book.

Another problem with the book is the title. *Blind Justice* is so inappropriate a title that the words of the title go beyond sarcasm or irony. While all authors faced with publishers' demands for more "marketable" titles gnash their teeth, Ms. Lewitt could scarcely be blamed for terminal bruxism.

Carve the Sky by Alexander Jablovkov

New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991; \$21.95 hc; 298 pages

reviewed by Brian Stableford

Science fiction writers suffer more than writers in other genres from the problem of maguffin inflation. (I am uncertain of the spelling because the word has not yet reached my dictionary, but "maguffin" was the term applied by the late Alfred Hitchcock to the small objects of desire—spools of microfilm, rare stamps, stolen blueprints etc.—which served as lures to help him move and orchestrate his plots.) While humble thriller-writers can still get by with reasonably-sized pots of gold, if writers have to work in another dimension entirely; if a modern sf novel is not to seem cheapfake, nothing less than the destiny of the entire human race can be at issue. The problem with this is that there are only so many ways in which the destiny of the entire human race can be at issue, and the habitual sf reader is likely to encounter them all fairly regularly. The ambitious first novelist must therefore work pretty damned hard if he is to convince his readers that he is doing something new and fresh. Alexander Jablovkov does his best to keep up with the current melodramatic exchange rates, and deserves credit for putting on a good show, even though the end at which we ultimately arrive is much more nearly a cliché than a surprise.

The plot of *Carve the Sky*, in brief, concerns the attempts of Anton Lindgren, seneschal to Lord Monboddo (famous statesman and art collector) to track down a huge and very valuable lump of "ngomite" from which an enigmatic work of art which appears to be by a dead artist appears to have been hewn. Lindgren has ulterior motives, and so has everyone else who joins in the chase—most notable among them being Vanessa Karagorge of the Academia Sapientiae, who is fated eventually to get together with Anton despite the fact that both start off with other erotic entanglements. It will be clear to the alert reader right from the word go that although most of Jablovkov's characters appear to be chasing the fabled skipful of ngomite for reasons of petty avarice there must really be much more at stake than that, or nobody would be bothering, but there is enough distraction *en route* to prevent this awareness from giving rise to impatience. In the course of his quest Anton admires a lot of works of art, takes a jumpy-ride into the Pamirs, goes boar-hunting on the moon, has a sword-fight or two (and

This is an uneven book, but there's far more here than leaps out from a superficial reading. There's much to be impressed by, almost too much, in that Emile Saint-Just becomes less and less real, like nightmare fading into the all-too-real and flooded streets of the Quartier du Paris. ▶

L. E. Modest, Jr., lives in East Haverhill, New Hampshire, and his latest book is *The Magic of Redback*.

witnesses a few more), finds out more than he really wanted to know about the supposedly-extinct Dispossessed Brethren of Christ, zooms off to the asteroid belt, and generally has a spiffing time until taking the star role in an appropriately melodramatic climax, when the destiny of the entire human race hangs in the balance (as the destiny of the entire human race is, after all, ever wont to do in such works as this).

Carve the Sky is nothing more than baroque costume drama, but it has the style and panache which baroque costume drama requires if it is to be entertaining. Everything is dressed up in reasonably gaudy fashion: the solar system, the characters, the cults and organizations to which the characters belong, and the descriptive paragraphs which try to convince us that the future really might be like this. Much of the exotic verbiage is borrowed—one of the leading characters has casually lifted the name of a long-dead minor intellectual; the briefly-sketched mysteries of the secret society at the heart of the plot seem oddly indebted to the rituals of Freemasonry—but as the central characters are mostly artists or art-collectors as well as secret agents, they presumably have a licence to appropriate whatever they need in the interests of making things sound interesting.

Carve the Sky is an eccentric entertainment without any real speculative depth at all, but as literary confessions go it's definitely on the good side of tolerable. The quotations with which the dust-wrapper is lavishly bedecked imply that there might be more within the covers than there actually is, but hype suffers from inflation just like everything else, and one simply can't get one's congratulatory effusions on to a halfway decent dust-wrapper these days unless one is prepared to pretend that it encloses something incredibly ultra-special. In metaphorical terms, *Carve the Sky* is pure literary ngomite—which is to say that it's infinitely stronger on fancy names and numinous claims than it is on real meaning—but when I got to the end and found out that I was exactly where I expected to be I still felt that I'd had fun getting there. ▶

Brian Stableford's most recent collection is *Sexual Chemistry*.

The Host by Peter Emshwiller

New York: Bantam Spectra, May 1991; \$4.50 pb; 358 pages

reviewed, more or less, by Bryan G. Chollin

"Did you finish that book?" she asks, seeing the malformed essay on the screen.

"Oh yeah, a while ago," I say, wondering where the printouts had gone.

"Well, how was it?"

"It was okay, but I thought it was kind of wimpy." Ah, stuck in the print manager again.

"Well, that's really incisive."

"Well, he has some good ideas, but he doesn't have any teeth. He just kind of gnaws them."

"Sounds like you'll be a contender for one of those awards." She says.

Stock phrase: *The Host*, by Peter Emshwiller (yes, he is), is an interesting if flawed first novel by a promising new writer.

One of the first things I noticed when I finished reading this book was how quickly I'd read it. I don't normally get through books very fast. I don't think this is because I'm an excruciatingly careful reader, but just because my brain is slow. Now, I can't have read this book much faster than usual because the prose and story were so very uncomplicated, because it wouldn't have been interesting enough to get past the first chapter. *As contrains*, it must indicate a certain combination of slick, smooth writing and a well paced, interesting plot, with reasonably engaging characters. However, unlike the cosmic background, the

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narrative is not without its lumps. The literary varnish lays a bit thick in spots, not too thick to choke on, but one must work a little harder to swallow (or at least I did).

A small lump: "The Ragman had seen death. Death for Watly. And Watly did not want to die. He did not. And Mitterly had no right to live if someone like Watly could die. None at all." And another: "Hugging and hugging and hugging. He thought that this was the end. This was the end of everything. This was all there would ever be. The hugging would last forever—just like this. On and on. But no. The clinging ended after a time. They touched foreheads and leaned into one another. Now they were two. Now they were two separate people. Now Watly felt shame. Horrible shame for bringing Alyps into it all in the first place."

Individually, these segments don't really seem too bad, but there's an unsettling cumulative effect over the length of the book. An effect much like the rush of twirling around in a circle and then falling over.

Watly is poor ("First Level"), and a host. What a host does for a living is to rent out his or her body to a rich person ("Second Level"), by means of a pseudo-telepathic device implanted in the skull of the host. While hosting, the host has absolutely no control over his body, though the host is fully aware of what the body is doing. Second Level, in New York City, is built up over First Level, so that the poor people of First Level live in a controlled environment with artificial lighting and recirculated air. Second Level has sunshine and fresh air, big houses and lawns. Below all of this, in what used to be the subway, is the subversive hangout.

This is a pretty good setup for some rather biting social commen-

tary. But the commentary does not bite. Mostly Watly whines about how unfair everything is. He does this several times, and my main response is, well, so what else is new? Not Watly's attitude seems to be that of the mainstream liberal who probably thinks *Mother Jones* is the cutting edge of political thought. And it doesn't fit Watly's world very well.

How are we supposed to feel the suffering and oppression if we don't taste the dirt in our mouths and smell the shit? Despite the mess Watly's world is obviously in, I didn't feel any rough edges. It was all just a little too clean and neat. Even the revolutionaries were neat and clean, and rather well stocked and organized, and, oddly, the Second Level folk have absolutely no idea they exist. It seems rather unbelievable to me that people whose whole way of life depends on such total domination of the poor would be so clueless about what's really going on down there. The subversives, on the other hand, seemed to have a lot of interesting knowledge about the Second Level. According to the Author's Note, there's going to be a sequel to this book, but there doesn't seem to be much point—it's rather plainly preordained.

Mind you, I did actually, on the whole, enjoy reading this book. The plot and pacing are handled very well. In spite of the overall weaknesses, the immediate situations are developed fairly strongly, so that the narrative held my interest in finding out what would come next. It was, on the whole, even fairly surprising, even if a few of the particulars were disappointing. And so, for next time, let us hope for dentures and tightened prose. ▶

Bryan G. Chalfin lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Greg Cox

Excerpts from *The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction*

FALK, LEE

The Phantom #12: The Vampires and the Witch (Avon/King Features, 1974: 154 pp.)

The Phantom, a masked superhero also known as The Ghost Who Walks, originally appeared in the classic comic strip series created by Falk himself. The adventure here novelized as *The Vampires and the Witch* apparently first appeared in the newspaper strip as well.

This time around, the Phantom leaves his jungle headquarters to travel to the primitive (and cliché-ridden) little European nation of Koquania, where a string of mysterious murders, apparently committed by black garbed men with fangs, have occurred very near an ancient castle where, generations before, the Phantom's ancestor was said to have encountered both vampires and an immortal witch. Not surprisingly, especially for those who have read either "Underground" by Robert Bloch or *The Vampire Affair* of the men from U.N.C.L.E., witch and vampires are ultimately revealed as imposters: Nazi war criminals guarding a secret treasure.

Although most series characters seem to meet vampires eventually, they seldom run into the real thing. See also: DILLARD and ROBESON.

Fans of the Phantom will enjoy this book more than true vampire aficionados, I suspect.



LORTZ, RICHARD

Children of the Night (Dell, 1974: 202 pp.)

Although this short novel was later retitled *Dracula's Children*, the first title remains the more appropriate one. Contrary to what one might expect, we do not have here another sequel to Bram Stoker. The Count appears only as a literary reference, a standard by which the book's own horrors are judged.

What we do have is harder to define. *Children of the Night* is not

really a vampire story. The children themselves come closer to being werewolves than anything else. One almost hesitates to label this book a novel; the plot is minimal, a string of disturbing episodes followed by a perfunctory resolution, and an epilogue that resolves nothing at all.

What this really is is an *exposé*. For seventeen chapters, Lortz gives the reader a guided tour of the decay and human misery that can be found in the poorer sections of New York City (and, presumably, any city.) Drugs, poverty, sex, violence. Boredom. Rage. Despair. Lortz shows it all, every rough and crude detail. This is a depressing portrait of urban hell, as seen through the eyes of five young residents. It is the experiences of those five children, told simultaneously in five concurrent chapters, that make up the bulk of the book. It is their peculiar form of escape, an unexplained supernatural transformation, that brings it into the genre of horror fiction.

Unusual. Eccentric. Interesting. Such words best describe *Children of the Night*. And the same can be said of Lortz's prose, a strange mixture of documentary realism, lyrical fancy, and a detached, almost conversational commentary on the events. By that I mean that Lortz, the omniscient third-person narrator, is "there" as a presence in the book. One review described this as "a deliberate skillful artificiality." Whatever, it is compelling enough to keep the reader going, despite the absence of a strong narrative thread.

What else can be said? The book rewards the reader as it is read and lingers in the mind afterwards. Never has the Metro bus between work and home seemed so full of wasted, tragic-looking human animals than during the two days I read *Children of the Night*.

You may, if you wish, take that as a recommendation.



LOWELL, MARC

An Enquiry into the Existence of Vampires (Doubleday, 1974: 181 pp.)

When an anonymous letter from a self-proclaimed vampire appears in the agony column of a London newspaper, a horde of

skeptical journalists descend upon the source of the letter: a small town in Yorkshire. So, too, does Peter Mansfield, a young Canadian with a much more serious interest in finding the vamp, for reasons which only gradually become clear.

This low-key little novel is short on horror, but long on mysteries: Who sent that celebrated letter? Why does Peter so desperately need to find her? Who else is looking for the Undead, and why? Without spoiling too much of the plot, we can safely shelve this volume under the heading of Scientific Vampirism; the only *nosferatu* here are the innocent victims of a genetic disorder characterized by moderate bloodlust and hypnotic powers. Misunderstood by the world at large, they have been driven to secrecy by the hostility of superstitious mankind.

None of these are new ideas, and *Enquiry* is hardly a classic, but it has its moments and occasional twists.



ALLEN, PETER (pseudonym of ???)

"Domdaniel" (*The Vampire's Bedside Companion*, 1975: 29 pp.)

The author has rightly refused to take credit for this shamelessly derivative rehashing of *Dracula*. "Allen" doesn't miss a trick here: fear-stricken peasants, hairy palms, mysterious "pinpricks" on fair white female throats. The plot isn't terribly original either.

A family of modern English tourists, exploring Scotland, foolishly accept the hospitality of Damon Domain, lord of an old manor known as Domdaniel. Not until his wife and both daughters have been drained does the dim-witted hero realize the Truth, and wins a Pyrrhic victory by setting the whole corny edifice aflame.

"Domdaniel" is possibly the worst of three bad stories in *The Vampire's Bedside Companion*, a British anthology that has the feel of an Amateur Show, featuring writers who felt like trying their hand at a vampire story, but didn't know enough to avoid the clichés. See also: DERBY, HOWARD, TURNER and the Bibliography.



EAR, IAN

Village of Blood (UK: New English Library, 1975: 128 pp.)

"'Fancy being a queen and a vampire,' Ann said. 'I didn't know that was possible.'"

That's queen as in male homosexual, by the way, and it is indeed rare, if not exactly unheard-of (see LE FANU). Nor is this the only thing odd about the vampire Lord Rellingham. He's old and ugly for one thing, and he dines exclusively on A3-type blood, apparently as a matter of preference. (His Lordship luckily has access to community medical records, thus allowing him to locate victims of the appropriate vintage.) He can also survive death-by-fire, and may be able to transform himself into a large white tiger—although the book is actually somewhat unclear about that latter point. Oh yes, he also produces horror movies.

Alas, all these . . . er, innovations are more or less wasted in a routine horror potboiler set in old English village. A modern-day movie crew comes to the cursed community of Reston to film a new vampire picture, and learns, like the cast of John Saxton's *The Torturer*, a gruesome lesson about the dangers of filming on location.

Village of Blood is perhaps not as silly as it sounds. Still, it's not terribly exciting either.



DERBY, CRISPIN

"To Claim His Own" (*The Vampire's Bedside Companion*, 1975: 35 pp.)

Not so much a short story as a mini-novel, complete with about a dozen characters, about an old Romanian vampire (Dr. Kocsi) who travels to England to claim the daughter of his former enemy; sort of an unofficial sequel to *Dracula*, boiled down to less than forty pages,

and another generic vampire story from the pages of the *Bedside Companion*, albeit better written than "Domdaniel."



ELLISON, HARLAN

"V is for the Voordlake" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*, 1975: 1 page.)

Gore, apparently, are the blissful days when Count Dracula could feed without thought or care of blood-borne infection. "The New Men" by Joanna Russ has already demonstrated the fatal effects of dining on a leukemia victim, now yet another old-fashioned Count succumbs to hepatitis—after setting up shop in a hippie commune in upstate California. Oh well, at least he missed the inevitable epidemic of AIDS-related vampire stories, which was still a few years down the road (see PURTILL, SHEFFIELD, WATSON).

This humorous short-story appeared as part of a mini-anthology titled "The Chocolate Alphabet," which can be found in Ellison's collection, *Strange Wines*.



Which brings us halfway through the 1970's, when, at last, the Heroic Vampire finally emerges—comes out of his coffin-shaped closet. If you had been waiting for years to root for the vampire with a clear conscience, now was your chance. Oh, the evil and nastier *nosferatu* will manage to stay busy as well, but more and more often we shall find the Undead fighting on the side of the angels.

GOULART, RON

Vampirella #1: *Bloodstake* (Warner, 1975: 140 pp.)

Vampirella #2: *On Alien Wings*

Vampirella #3: *Deadwalk*

Vampirella #4: *Blood Wedding*

Vampirella #5: *Deathgame*

Vampirella #6: *Snakegod*

"Glory" (*Fantasy & Science Fiction*, December 1986: 14 pp.)

The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle (Avon, 1984: 174 pp.)

The Curse of the Obelisk (Avon, 1987: 139 pp.)

Ah yes . . . Vampirella! Strange visitor from the planet Drakulon, able to soar over tall buildings with bat-like wings. Vampirella—who, disguised as the assistant of an alcoholic seag magician, fights a never-ending battle against demons, madmen, and her own bloodlust. Vampirella—the scantily-clad queen of horror comics.

Vampirella first appeared in 1969 as the star of her own oversized, black-and-white comic book. In 1983, *Vampirella* magazine was cancelled along with several other titles by the Warren Communications Corporation, but as of this writing it has recently reappeared on the stands. There are only six novels, though, released in the mid-Seventies when Vampi was at the height of her popularity, and a Hammer Films adaptation seemed just around the corner. As author Ron Goulart explains,

"I took the 15-20 page comic stories and turned them into 160-180 page novels. It often took great cunning and ingenuity."

So I can imagine.

Vampirella herself is both a Scientific and Reluctant vampire. She is not fond of playing the savage predator, but her alien metabolism places certain demands on her: on Drakulon, you see, blood took the place of water. Vampi does have a blood-substitute serum that eliminates all need for homicide, but the darn stuff tends to get lost or stolen at least once every book.

One of Vampirella's recurring antagonists is Conrad Van Helsing, a descendant of the Count's old enemy. (Yes, there are normal Earthling vampires in these books too.) Conrad, a dedicated vampire-hunter, is also father to Adam Van Helsing, Vampi's primary romantic interest.

Also opposed to Vampirella are the Companions of Chaos, a widespread cult of sorcerers and demon-worshippers. The Companions are fond of employing monstrous servants like werewolves and zombies, but are invariably thwarted in their fiendish schemes by the vampires from space. Fighting evil, apparently, is one way a Reluctant Vampire

can atone for her killings.

How good are these books? Well, they read like what they are: novelized comic scripts. Each volume contains two or three distinct adventures and no chapter lasts longer than about five pages, so the books move too quickly for anything in the way of mood or depth. Aside from occasional doses of humor, the prose consists of the minimum amount of wordage necessary to take the story from Point A to Point B. And, like an oldtime radio show, the characters tend to talk to themselves a lot: "Here I am, doing this and that, because..."

In other words, this isn't *Dracula*, folks. Or even *The Dracula Archives*. And despite the cheesecake covers, these are not terribly sexy books. Vampires lose her costume quite frequently (even more often than she misplaces her blood-substitute), but that's about it—and probably more fun in the comic book illustrations.

For younger readers mostly.



Goulart's own books and stories are equally insubstantial, even if more original.

In "Glory," a pair of greedy Hollywood hustlers literally resurrect a famous 1930s starlet, then try to overlook her unusual dietary requirements, which involve an average of 27.5 victims a year. The plot is predictable (Guess who gets murdered eventually?), but Glory is certainly a far cry from the dark and skinny vamps we've come to expect. A brassy blonde, she comes off like Mae West with fangs, which kind of makes you wish she could have done a flick with Bela Lugosi....

"Good evenink, my Transylvanian chickadee."



Naida Strand, undying villainess of *The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle* and *The Curse of the Obelisk*, is a much more traditional vampiress

than either Glory or Vamp: seductive, hypnotic, nefarious. Unfortunately, at least for our purposes, she plays only a minor role in both of these fast-paced, overcrowded tales of Victorian swashbuckling. Granted Goulart provides any number of other menaces to keep his hero, detective Harry Challenge, busy, including mummies, wolfmen, killer robots, mad scientists, and even (in *Obelisk*) flocks of giant mechanical bats, but Naida herself seldom makes more than a cameo appearance. Another featured vampire, the evil Dr. Mayerling in *Blackwood*, fares even worse: he's dispatched by a silver bullet before he even appears onstage!

Still, it is perhaps significant that Naida Strand, unlike the rest of Harry's adversaries, manages to survive both adventures. No doubt we'll see more of her if and when the series continues.



For more on Goulart, see ROBESON.

HOWARD, RICHARD

"Dies Irae" (*The Vampire's Bedside Companion*, 1975: 22 pp.)

A vampire monk returns for revenge in the only decent story in the infamous *Bedside Companion*. Excavations at an English monastery unleash a murderous revenant, while scholarly research reveals the sad story of Brother Mark, a young monk who was seduced—and then excommunicated—by a treacherous abbot. Like the tragic vampires of "The Last Lords of Gardons" and "For the Blood is the Life," Brother Mark is a once-innocent victim who now preys on both the guilty and the blameless.

"Dies Irae" is not always as creepy as it could be, but it, as well as the entire monastic brotherhood, comes to a grimly effective end.



Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

Revised 2/91

PETER SOYER BEAGLE

b. 1939

THE FANTASY WORLDS OF PETER BEAGLE. New York: The Viking Press, [1978].

First published in 1978... on copyright page. First book appearance of "Come, Lady Death." Also collects LILA THE WEREWOLF, THE LAST UNICORN, and A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE all published earlier as separate books.

A FINE AND PRIVATE PLACE. New York: The Viking Press, Memoirs.

Boards with cloth shelf back. First published in 1960 on copyright page.

THE FOLK OF THE AIR. New York: Ballantine Books, [1986].

Boards with cloth shelf back. First Edition: September 1986/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page. Note: Released 12 December 1986.

THE LAST UNICORN. New York: The Viking Press, [1986].

Boards with cloth shelf back. First published in 1968... on copyright page.

LILA THE WEREWOLF. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1974.

Two issues, no priority. (A) Boards. 75 numbered copies signed by Beagle. Note: Not issued in dust jacket. (B) Wrappers. Note: First printing bears \$1.95 price on rear cover; second printing carries \$2.50 price. No statement of printing on copyright page.

References

Peter Beagle, [by] Kenneth J. Zahorski. Mercer Island, Washington: Stormont House, 1988.

Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. Issued by Stormont House Reader's Guide 44.

Note: This is part of a series of bibliographic checklists of SF and fantasy writers that will update, revise, and expand the standard reference work *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors* by L. W. Currey. For the organizational principles and methodology used in this and future lists, please refer to the introduction to that work. Knowledgeable persons are invited to communicate addenda and corrigenda directly to L. W. Currey, Elizabeth, NY 12932.

Screed

(letters of comment)

Alexei Panshin, Riegelsville, Pennsylvania

John Clute and Brian Stableford have criticized *The World Beyond the Hill* for being a "Whig history." If I am understanding them correctly, a Whig history is supposed to be a parochial, self-congratulatory brand of revisionism which sees everything previous as no better than a failed attempt at the state of supposed perfection that it is electing to idolize. John and Brian assert that *The World Beyond the Hill* makes just such an idol out of the Golden Age of Astounding, holding it up as the be-all and end-all of SF, with everything that comes before being a mere predicate and everything after a decline.

As it happens, however, our book doesn't claim to be a history, Whig or otherwise. And it never claims that there was anything either perfect or final about Golden Age SF.

Instead of that, *The World Beyond the Hill* presents itself as a study of the form of myth that dressed its images of transcendent possibility in "scientific" clothing. And if it ends in 1945, this not because that was some frozen moment of perfection, but rather because after this time the images of transcendence presented in SF ceased to be described and explained as super-science.

It is images of transcendence in SF and how they changed and evolved over time that is important to Cory and me, and not any one person, story or period. And, in fact, from the beginning of the book to its end, *The World Beyond the Hill* specifically speaks of limitations in Golden Age SF. So, for that matter, does my essay which appears cheek-by-jowl with Clute's review of our book.

I think *The World Beyond the Hill* is a metamorphical study—a book about the dynamics of myth... as specifically exemplified by the conceptual development of science fiction. What is more, Cory and I have two more such studies in progress. One examines the different conceptual clothing myth has worn through human history, and the worldly events and actions which have resulted from the application of these differing myths. The other traces the roots of post-Cambellian SF, and demonstrates the contention between Cambellian and non-Cambellian concepts in SF from 1945 to 1970. I hope that when we publish it, we won't be either condemned or congratulated for having abandoned our supposed former Whiggish attachment to Cambell.

Our Whiggery is a straw man. It is a false issue.

And yet there is a real issue. I think the actual argument between us and John Clute and Brian Stableford is not over our conclusions at all, but rather over our premises. In and around their wars against Whiggery and their "exhilarating brand of nastiness," John and Brian indicate that these premises are unacceptable to them. They don't argue them—they just piss on them in passing—but it is apparent that they do reject them.

These are our premises: We believe that SF is not just a bunch of stories that someone sometime happened to lump together, but rather is an organic entity. We think that SF is modern myth, serving the same function myth has always served of reinforcing current values and also leading beyond them. We think that images of transcendence are central to myth in all forms, including SF. And we think that the images of unknown things, higher possibility and human becoming in SF can usefully be studied.

Brian and John say otherwise. Brian, for instance, says flatly, "Nobody could sensibly write about sf as though it were a kind of organic entity." John, for his part, wants to "put to one side" our version of the nature of myth—or possibly to substitute some other definition, which he says that he can do, but doesn't do: ("This doesn't seem the place or time to make any sustained argument for any alternative version of the nature of myth in the world or in the text...") John says that transcendence is a "reified wet-dream"—whatever that may be. Brian says that seeking transcendence is fruitless, and to the extent that we have convinced him that John Campbell was seeking transcendence, he now thinks that Campbell's influence was "a Bad Thing." Lastly, John and Brian both say that it is an error

on our part to speak of the images, expressions and concepts of SF as though they had existence of any kind. They are just words on a page and no more than that.

Here are real issues. What is the nature of SF, and what can legitimately be said about it? So let's fight about that rather than whether Cory and I deserve to be hanged for the crime of idolizing the Golden Age of Astounding.

Speaking as a faux-naïve hillbilly to a pair of faux-sophisticated tight-little-islanders, I challenge John and Brian to meet me on the substance of these issues—and without any more of the personal attacks that seem to satisfy the British love of blood sport but which don't actually advance the discussion. If you have reasoned arguments to make, find the time and space to make them. Cite your authorities. Present your evidence. Make your case at whatever length you like, and I will then make mine. The results can be printed here in *NYRSF*.

You do have a real case to make, don't you?

Darrell Schweitzer, Stratford, Pennsylvania

That Paul Witcover's review of Moorcock's *Mother London* is the first I've seen, certainly the first mention of the book as sf, means I suppose that Witcover has inadvertently fingered the provincialism of sf readers. We didn't read it because we thought it was a mainstream novel. I suspect that a lot of sf folks did as I did, found it remaindered or in the Strand basement, bought it, and put it aside to be read Eventually. As non-sf, which the jacket and blurbs give it every suggestion of being, it would not be a choice for an sf reviewer (who often has time to read little else than books for review) to start right away. We can admire Moorcock's courage in writing such a genre-transcendent work, but we might also wonder if the decision to publish it as mainstream cost it sales. (Or would it have done even worse as sf?) In any case, Witcover overstates his case, and may, like Franz Rottensteiner twenty years ago trying to sell Stanislaw Lem as The Greatest SF Writer in the World, be doing the object of his admiration a disservice. Since *NYRSF* is presumably only read by people who find some interest and worth in contemporary sf, Witcover, like Rottensteiner before him (who tried to convince us that virtually all sf was worthless but for that of his client, Lem), must inevitably face a 100% disbelieving audience, which, when it finds his claims about *Mother London* a trifle inflated, will tend to dismiss the book, perhaps unfairly.

When you shoot at the king, you must kill him. When you try to tear down a whole dynasty (or genre), that's an even taller order.

Teras Wolansky, Jersey City, NJ

I came across the following lines in James Morrow's review (*NYRSF* #32) of *When the Music's Over*, edited by Lewis Shiner: "The editor makes no secret of his contempt for Jerry Pournelle's popular *There Will Be War* anthologies (which, if you haven't heard, feature the sort of big mayhem that gives fascism a bad name)."

Morrow's statement stuck in my mind. The next time I visited my local Waldenbooks, I made a point of looking up the series.

Among others, Vol. 7 of *There Will Be War* includes "fascistic" stories by: Harry Turtledove, Rob Chilson, Walter Jon Williams. Volume 6 includes: James Patrick Kelly, Greg Bear, Brad Ferguson. Volume 9: John Brunner, Robert Silverberg, Norman Spinrad.

Volume 8 also includes a triptych of brilliant war poems; and an epic poem by Paul Edwin Zimmer about the great Indian chief Logan, who tried to keep the peace between Indian and white. It begins: "We are met upon the graves of a million murdered children; We are met beneath the shadow of slaughtered women, children."

I suspect Morrow is guilty of blaming the messenger. The series is called "There Will Be War," not "There Should Be War." We may wish to dream Pournelle will be proved wrong, but the history of the last 4000 years is certainly on his side.

The New York Review of Science Fiction 23

Post Punk

Like wounded souls in search of love, moving from one tumultuous relationship to another, the fantastic genres seem to seek out new literary movements zealously. Wave upon stormy wave breaks on these shores, raising hopes, then crashing them and receding, leaving lasting works of art upon the sands (where future waves will bury or uncover them). Ever the reader's solitary heart can hope that next wave will bring an answer, or comfort and solace for the soul.

Cyber- and splatterpunk seeming now to have crashed, lonely eyes sweep the horizon in search of white-caps that may become the next movement, The Next New Wave, that which is so important that it requires Capital Letters. So great is this need for a New Wave that people have tried to fabricate a "Steampunk" movement and even given the writers astutely grouped in Donald G. Keller's article "The Manner of Fantasy" (*NYRSE*, #32) the moniker of "mannerpunks."

I can't assert this humbly, so I'll be forthright: "Punk" time is over. The artists of these movements remain the joyriders are washing away.

The trough of a wave is actually as interesting as the crest. What people perceive as a "lull" is not a lull at all, but few people have noticed, because the writers of this new "movement" (or, better still, ~~movement~~) aren't particularly ones to yell obscenities and pierce their cartilage and piss off their parents.

Rather, these young and disparate talents (who will undoubtedly and rightfully bristle at my grouping of them) have taken to heart the writings of Tom Disch and Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller and Connie Willis and Lucius Shepard (writers who have all created excellent fiction during this "lull") and focused on quieter aesthetic values than those associated with the true "punk" movements. Making balms rates higher than screaming in pain. Writing about the earth takes precedence over writing about rock 'n' roll. Investigating reality comes before jacking into it. The aim of making the world a better place strikes me as a goal common to the works, and I hope that Susan Palwick and Tony Daniel will forgive me for labeling them "new utopians."

I'm using this label not in hopes that it will stick—the last thing any young writer needs is a single-minded term haunting their careers—but in order to overcome the prevalence of the "p" suffix. Truly, there is more to genre fiction than new drug experiences and screaming guitar licks, and in order for us to appreciate the naturalistic metaphors that Tony, Ted Chiang and others are building from the sciences and mathematics, we need to see their fiction in its proper light—sunlight, not neon.

For me to name more names would be unfair, since most of these young artists are not yet known by readers; likewise, without many published works to which I can refer, I can't expect people to accept a discussion of the ways in which these writers strive to apply romantic literary traditions to *if through the science* (though I can encourage people to read "Prism Tree" and "Division by Zero" in *Full Spectrum* 3). Nor can I yet justify why I discarded certain outlying points in sketching this line of best fit.

Rather, I can simply carry out my naturalistic metaphor and encourage all to look beyond the splashy foam atop the wave and note the basic riches in the trough.

—Gordon Van Gelder & the editors

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